Test Drive Report for
Acer Ferrari 4000 Notebook Computer

Introducing Ferrari's Latest Challenger

It's absolutely normal to think about amazing looking and sounding red sports cars at the mention of the Ferrari name. Formula 1 is also inextricably linked with Ferrari – a brand name representing such immense exotic value that the widget manufacturers can't stop making Ferrari-themed lifestyle products such as cologne and team shirts. In the IT sector, there is no lack of Ferrari products either – Olympus has binoculars, and Acer has notebooks. The latter's latest effort is the Ferrari 4000.

A contemporary Ferrari Formula 1 challenger

As a long term sponsor and technical partner of the Ferrari team, Acer has, with the unveiling of the Ferrari 4000 series notebooks, entered into its 4th generation of Ferrari-themed notebooks. The previous generations spanned the 3000, 3200 and 3400 series. The new 4000 series notebooks feature not only improved internals – there's a full rework of the aero package too!

An Acer 4000 notebook

Power for the Acer Ferrari 4000 comes courtesy of AMD's latest: the notebook-specific Turion 64 processor. For the 15.4" widescreen, Acer has chosen to go with the ATI supplied Mobility RADEON X700 graphics core. Fans will also be glad of the fact that Acer has built a space-saving slot-load DVD drive into the notebook.

Carbon Fiber Work of Art

It takes some getting used to seeing a non self-propelling Ferrari product in anything other than predominantly rosso corsa (Ferrari red). Even the previous-gen Acer Ferrari notebooks were also almost wrapped fully in red. The Ferrari 4000 is an entirely different matter: it looks shiny gray with a strip of red from a distance, catching you off guard somewhat, until you move close enough to recognize the sporty carbon fiber cover.

Cover of the Ferrari 4000

The 4000 is in fact a re-skin of the Travel Mate 8100 notebook with some internal reconfiguration work. Of course, this would be no Ferrari product without the legendary prancing horse badge. The 4000's goes smack in the middle of the tasteful carbon fiber cover.

Scuderia Ferrari badge

Keyboard

Like the TravelMate 8100 series, the Ferrari 4000 features an ergonomically-designed arced keyboard layout that is unique to Acer. An ergonomically formed keyboard can help reduce user fatigue when compared to traditional keyboards. In our short but enjoyable experience with the 4000, both chatting and word processing felt less laborious than before.

This widescreen notebook computer features an elongated TouchPad for enhanced user comfort. Below it, and snuggled in between the right and left mouse buttons is a quad-direction scrolling navigator that users can put to good use so that they don't have to perform finger acrobatics in order to position the mouse pointer perfectly on the scroll bar buttons.

Keyboard, Touchpad, Wrist Rest

Located at the right hand corner of the all-black wrist rest is a second Ferrari badge to remind users that they are indeed at the controls of a Ferrari. The wrist rest is designed with a material quality that aptly approximates the splendor of a Ferrari's cockpit. This faux-leather surface requires careful maintenance from the user, and the overall experience is nothing if not pleasurable. This is Acer's first attempt at such a design by adopting this material.

Buttons at the upper right hand corner of the unit

To the opposite end of the status LEDs are four quick launch buttons that have become almost standard on Acer notebooks. By default they are set to launch Internet Explorer and Outlook, among others. As is often the case with quick launch buttons, these can be reassigned with to better accommodate the user help from Acer's quick launch button management software.

Ports and Interfaces

From left to right on the left hand side of the Ferrari 4000 (image below) we have the D-Sub VGA out port, the heat vents, the 10/100/1000Mbps RJ-45 Ethernet port, V.92 56Kbps modem RJ -11 port, USB 2.0 port, 4-pin FireWire/IEEE1394 port and a PCMCIA slot.

Port and interfaces on the left of the Ferrari 4000

On the right, again from left to right, are: 3 USB 2.0 ports, a slot-load optical drive, power connector and notebook lock aperture.

Right side of the Ferrari 4000

In total we are presented with 4 USB 2.0 ports. This is a relatively large number and should allow most users to avoid having to purchase a USB hub. The slot load drive in particular has been a feature of the Acer Ferrari series notebooks, and we are glad that the 4000 has held on to it. A slot load drive is a bit more convenient to use than tray load drives, and ultimately just look extremely cool.

This DVD burner supports DVD+R and DVD-R burning at a maximum of 8X, and will also burn on DVD+RW, DVD-RW, CD-R and CD-RW media.

Ports and Interfaces (2)

At the front end of the 4000 we find another array of ports, including a flash card reader, a microphone jack, earphone jack and IR port, as well as the Bluetooth power switch, status LED, and WLAN power switch and status LED.

Front ports and card reader

The front card reader is compatible with the SD, MMC, Memory Stick, Memory Stick Pro, and XD flash card formats. Smaller sized cards such as the mini SD and Memory Stick Duo can also be made to work with the help of their respective adapters.

Also at the front are two built-in speakers belting out agreeable audio that isn't perfect, but good enough with powerful bass and clarity. For demanding users it's recommended that they opt for a set of external speakers.

Another view of the Ferrari 4000

At the back users will find the ezDock connector and to its left the S-Video port and digital DVI port; the latter of which is especially rare on notebook computers. Acer's ezDock utilizes PCI Express technology and can provide up to 24 different expansion ports for the ultimate connectivity.

Display

The 4000 is equipped with a 15.4" WXGA+ widescreen LCD display with excellent viewability.

Shot of the display

The biggest single benefit of the WXGA+ resolution on a comparable 15.4" screen is the increase in on-screen content. The Ferrari 4000's display is built with a native resolution of 1,680 x 1,050 (1,764,000 pixels in total). Compared to a WXGA screen (1,280 x 800 = 1,024,000 pixels) and a XGA resolution screen (1,024 x 768 = 786,432 pixels) and the difference is immediately apparent (70% and 120% more content respectively). This is especially useful for users who need a lot of windows open simultaneously.

Straight up shot of the 4000

Higher resolutions come at the cost of smaller text – Acer has given full consideration to this area with the preinstalled copy of Windows featuring text a few pixels above the standard Windows font size to make reading and viewing an altogether more comfortable experience. If you upgrade your OS or install a different OS, please make sure to increase text size as it really does make a huge difference.

Packaging and Accessories

It's obvious how much attention has gone into the design of the Ferrari 4000's box. A tasteful black exterior matching the Ferrari 4000's interior color and Acer and Ferrari logos bestow it with an unarguable sense of class.

Sensuous packaging work

Inside the user will find the "traditional" array of accessories – a wireless Ferrari-badged mouse (predominantly black to match the 4000), a couple of AA-size batteries, and a USB recharging cable to allow pain-free recharging of the rechargeable batteries.

Accessories: Batteries, USB recharging cable, Ferrari mouse

Hardware Specifications

Providing the power for the Acer Ferrari 4000 notebook computer is the AMD Turion 64 ML-34 (1.8GHz) Processor and the ATI RADEON XPRESS 200P chipset complete with 128MB discrete ATI Mobility RADEON X700 graphics card. This is currently the crown jewel of the AMD mobile computing army. Users are also presented with the AMD Turion 64 ML-37 (2.0GHz) and AMD Turion 64 ML-40 (2.2GHz) processor options.

Focusing on the processor for a moment, the preceding member of the Ferrari series, the 3400 was equipped with the AMD Mobile Athlon 64 processor with TDP of 62W – compare that directly with the Turion ML-34's 35W and one can quite easily see that these models are quite far apart in terms of power consumption. As you will expect, the Ferrari 4000 is streets ahead in both battery time and detectable surface temperature.

Some of you might question the validity of Acer's choice in using the Turion ML-34 when the Intel Pentium M is known to have a TDP of just 27W. Previous Ferrari notebooks have also utilized AMD processors. It happens that AMD and Acer are both sponsors and technical partners of the Ferrari Formula 1 team.

Testing is performed using the Windows XP SP2 professional operating system.

Benchmarking – Battery Life and Gaming Performance

Although the ATI Mobility Radeon X700 graphics core can't compete with bigger brother Mobility Radeon X800 in performance terms, it is the current preferred choice for graphics performance in notebooks weighing below 3Kg for its more desirable power consumption and thermal performance characteristics. The ATI Mobility Radeon X800 is better applied in desktop replacement notebooks as they are less restricted in terms of internal volume, which can in turn be used to provide better heat dissipation.

ATI Mobility Radeon X700

3DMark03 - Ferrari 4000 vs. Samsung X50, 1024 x 768@32-bit:

	Acer Ferrari 4000
3DMark 05	6358

The 128MB ATI Mobility RADEON X700 proves very capable in 3DMark03.

Battery Performance
The 14.8V battery in the Ferrari 4000 should provide some serious unplugged time with its 4800mAH capacity.

Ferrari 4000 and battery

Below are MobileMark 2005 benchmark results: the Battery Life results simulated by running normal applications and programs, and the Battery Life during DVD playback, which is run just as the name suggests.

	Acer Ferrari 4000
Battery Life	201
DVD Playback Battery Life	178

The Ferrari 4000's battery is very satisfying. These figures are very impressive for a powerful mainstream notebook computer.

Performance – Overall Performance

SysMark 2002

In the overall system tests we will use SYSMark 2002 and PCMark 2005 benchmarks. SYSMark 2002 in particular simulates office and business use, while PCMark 2005 is concerned with testing the specific performance of the hardware subsystems.

	Acer Ferrari 4000
Overall SYSmark score	252
Internet Content Creation	322
Office Productivity	198

The SYSMark 2002 test makes full use of the AMD Turion 64 ML-34 (1.8GHz) + ATI RADEON Xpress 200P chipset's potential.

PCMark 2005 Results

	Acer Ferrari 4000
PCMark Score	2661
CPU	2571
Memory	2075
Graphics	2959
HDD	3000

Excellent performance as you would expect from a Ferrari.

Conclusion

There's a lot to like about the Ferrari 4000. The carbon fiber cover, all new interior design, and excellent battery performance are to name but a few and mark a significant departure in terms of design concept from its predecessors. This is not a simple exercise in milking the worth of two very significant brand names because it is successfully showcases the performance of the AMD mobile computing platform.

Although the Acer Ferrari 4000 treads a different route from the company's otherwise mainstream product line, those who love the Ferrari name and feel the passion for all things Ferrari could just find the Ferrari 4000 more than worth its price tag.