

Datatel Advanced Communications Suitcase

By: Asymmetric

My first impression of this, upon receiving a pre-release unit from Datatel for review was "what the hell is this thing? Sounds cool."

The unit tested was the deluxe model, which comes with an integrated cellular phone, a shortwave radio, a Cybermodem, and a fax machine. This unit is slated to sell for a cool 8K EB, street price will probably be between 6.5 and 7K.

The Cybermodem is decent, but nothing to write home about. It's valuable to the average joeschmoe who has meetings to attend to in the 'net, and so on, but no netrunner would be caught dead using it, at least if there was even a public terminal nearby.

The interior of the suitcase is very spacious; when the keyboard is not stowed. I opened the unit up, set everything up, and filled it with the documents I usually carry in my laptop case, and lo and behold the keyboard would no longer fit inside. A replacement for a decent laptop and bag this is certainly not.

The fax machine and cellular phone worked as well as they should, considering they are based on technologies over thirty years old. The entire product left me wondering where the "Advanced" part of the name was going to come in to play.

I played with the shortwave radio for a while, and to be honest, it was entertaining to listen to news reports from around the world via the relay satellites, but I thought there must be some other reason for this. After fiddling some, I found out what it was. The radio is designed with an interface for the cybermodem, so you are supposed to be able to interface to the net from anywhere, on or off world.

I tested this "feature" of the shortwave, and nearly threw the entire unit out the window about 10 minutes into it. For the uninitiated, data transfer is VERY slow via shortwave, slower than anything you've ever seen

outside a museum. I was unable to use the 'net at all, it was intolerably slow. After some digging, I found a hidden setting for the IG transform on this unit, and was able to turn the detail down. Way down. We're talking pre-stone age here chummer, the rooms were converted to giant boxes, other 'runners were simply floating spheres with an ID tag beneath them, and forget about audio/video feeds in realtime.

I think that it's great to be able to listen to the weather reports in Tokyo, if you speak Japanese and are going there in the near future, but as for data transfer.. you're better off saving it for strictly text faxes. The included fax/printer is incapable of the most rudimentary holofaxes, nor can it print in anything approaching realistic colors. You're better off tying the cybermodem or fax machine into the cellular phone and staying near town, or carrying another bulky piece of equipment around to boost the signal, and contrary to their advertising, you can forget about any of this communications gear functioning for a whit in orbit.

Datatel assures me all these issues will be cleaned up with the box hits the streets in about a month.

In summary, I think this item does one thing and does it well. It makes an excellent doorstop. I am giving Datatel the "**Oh Damn, My Mommy Bought Me Another 'Computer Thing' for Christmas**" award. As many cyberthumbs as you care to manipulate down.

>>> **Update** <<<

The Datatel suitcase hit the streets today so I picked one up...and promptly returned it. They didn't fix *-any-* of the problems except maybe the color quality on the fax is a bit better. They did, however, affix a nice big chromed Datatel logo to the lid of the case, so you can advertise your purchasing blunder wherever you see fit.