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Beats Studio Buds Review

About

The Beats Studio Buds are water resistant wireless earbuds with active noise cancellation and a long battery life.

Purchase Date: 2022-12-25

Review Date: 2022-12-31



Review

The Beats Studio Buds are a middle tier earbud with good sound quality. Their small in-ear form factor, sound quality, and battery life are all standout features, however they also lack some features that have come to be expected in premium earbuds.

Key features:

- Active noise control
- Long battery life for earbuds and case
- Quick recharge of earbuds in case
- Multiple mics on each earbud

Missing features:

- Proximity sensor for auto play/pause

The Good

The Beats Studio Buds have great build quality, a sturdy case, pretty good sound (for wireless earbuds), and great battery life.

The battery life here really is top notch, and even if you do use the earbuds so long that they run out of juice, they will quick-charge in the case. Put them in the case for just a minute or two and you'll get over an hour more listening time.

The earbuds and case have a great premium feel to them, this is important for earbuds as they are prone to breaking quite easily.

I find these fit very well in the ears, stay in better than I expected, and are easier to put in than I expected. You may need to spend a minute getting used to their shape and how to insert them. Despite their tiny size, they are easy to take out of the case and put back in without dropping them.

The Okay

The Active Noise Cancelling (ANC) and Passthrough modes are okay at best. I don't think they have included enough microphones on this device to provide higher quality ANC or passthrough unfortunately.

It is difficult to tell which sound mode you are in, especially since ANC and passthrough aren't very exceptional. Exacerbating this is the use of sound effects telling you which mode you are in when you switch. I will never learn which sound means which, and find myself switching though them multiple times and clapping or tapping to try and tell which one I am in. I prefer earbuds that say which mode they are in when you switch, For example speaking out the words, "ANC" or "Ambient".

The buttons on these earbuds are physical. I'm normally all for physical buttons, but on earbuds, touch controls are much better. These are some of the best physical buttons I've tried on earbuds, so they aren't a major downside, but you are a little limited on the number of things you can control because of them. The plus side however is you'll never get accidental presses or wonder if you're pressing in the correct spot.

The Bad

While one-touch pairing is supposed to do away with all your bluetooth pairing troubles, I actually had a worse experience pairing these to my Android phone than I have ever had with any bluetooth

device in over a decade. The setup workflow is unclear as it tries to pair and install an app at the same time, leaving you on a screen with incorrect instructions. After my first time pairing, the earbuds would not reconnect to my phone, so I had to reset them and start from scratch. The second time I got errors with no way to resolve them. Eventually after a phone reboot and earbud reset everything paired fine. It was an incredibly frustrating experience and their app provides zero advice if everything doesn't go exactly as they have planned.

At this price-point it is unacceptable to not have proximity sensors.

It is not possible to control both ANC and volume at the same time. By default, you cannot control the volume level. I find it unbelievable that any company makes wireless earbuds that don't let you adjust the volume. Volume control is core functionality, full stop. Having said that, the poor passthrough does mean you could just give up that functionality and switch the headphones to volume control. Even with the change, volume control is still poorly implemented.

The case is very large despite these being very small earbuds. I'm not sure why they designed such a large case compared to other earbuds on the market. I want to keep earbuds in my pocket all the time, and these take up way too much pocket space. If you keep them elsewhere, this likely isn't as big of a deal for you.

Decision □□

While the Beats Studio Buds have a quality build and decent sound, the feature-set for the price-point is not quite there. Never pay full price for these. Even on sale there are completing products with good sound that include more features.

Your pairing experience may differ, and I hope it does, but one-touch pairing did not live up to the promise for me. And when it fails, you'll wish for your old pair of earbuds that at least would pair, even if it took 1 minute the first time.

I am using and enjoying my pair since they were a gift, but even receiving them for free I still dearly miss a proximity sensor for auto play-pause.

The Rest

My Purchase Price (including tax and shipping): This was a gift. Standard retail price is $149.99. Can often be found on sale for $99.95

Product Link: https://amzn.to/3PjKA93

Boltune Wireless Earbuds 030 Review

About

The Boltune 030 are water resistant wireless earbuds with active noise cancellation and in-ear detection.

Purchase Date: 2021-09-10

Review Date: 2022-01-25



Review

The Boltune 030 are budget earbuds first and foremost. They drew my attention because they punched above their weight in features and promised audio quality. There are many different models that come out on a regular basis, so this review may function well as a general review of Boltune earbud quality.

Key features:

- Proximity sensor for auto play/pause
- Active noise control
- Long battery life for earbuds and case
- Multiple mics on each earbud

The Good

These earbuds are significantly better quality than their price may suggest. The audio quality is on par with $50+ earbuds, with healthy levels across the spectrum.

These earbuds are both comfortable to wear and use. The touch sensitive pads on each bud are easy to find and press with a light touch. The controls are easy to learn and I rarely found myself making mistakes after the first week of use.

Active noise control is a great feature, and it works very well here. You can turn it off if desired while listening to music/etc, or set it to passthrough to pause your audio and hear the outside world almost as clearly as if you didn't have earbuds in.

The batteries in the earbuds themselves last a long time, and the case will charge them up several times over before needing a recharge itself. I never found myself wishing the battery lasted longer. The case is compact, feels nice, uses USB-C, and fits easily anywhere.

The earbuds connect fairly fast since they start connecting as soon as you open the case lid. They are also reliable in their connection, and I have never needed to re-pair them to fix any issues. Taking one out of your ear causes them to auto-pause your music, and putting them back in resumes it.

The Okay

Build quality and longevity are where Boltune saved some money on these earbuds. They feel good enough quality to the touch, but with my first pair the touch controls broke out of the blue, and my second pair sometimes act up as well. Boltune did replace my first pair after having my run through some basic checks. But they also forgot to ship the replacement from their warehouse and after a month I had to reach out asking for a tracking update. They quickly shipped my replacement after that.

The Bad

I find the earbuds difficult to remove from the case. The shape of the exposed portion of the earbuds make them slippery and easy to drop when you are removing them. I would say be careful, but even still you are bound to drop them. This is bound to shorten their lifespan when coupled with their mid-range build quality.

In some instances one of the buds would not fully settle into place causing it not to charge. At least a few times one of the buds died on my because it had not charged, despite being in a charged case for hours beforehand.

The earbuds constantly disconnect and reconnect whenever I use them for phone calls. It appears that using the speakers and mic at the same time cause the connection to drop. The earbuds do automatically reconnect fairly quickly, but you can miss a lot of important things when audio cuts

out for 5 seconds every few minutes. I do not know if this happens when connected to all devices, or it is an issue with my phone specifically. As it is now, they are not suitable for phone calls for me. Thankfully I only use them for music and podcasts 99% (invisible) of the time.

Decision □□

When on sale for under $50, these are a worthwhile pair of wireless earbuds. They sound good and are feature packed.

The trade-off you are making with a cheaper pair of Boltune earbuds like this is reliability. You may occasionally run into audio, connection, or even hardware issues. I would not expect these to reliably work for more than 2 years.

With the exception of the connection dropping on calls (Which may be a deal breaker for many), I have not had any major frustrations with these earbuds, and I often hear similar or worse frustrations from people using expensive name-brand wireless earbuds.

The Rest

My Purchase Price (including tax and shipping): **$39.75**

Usually on Sale at TaoTronics

Usually full price at Boltune: https://www.boltune.com/products/bt-bh030-wireless-earbuds-030-bluetooth



System76 Darter Pro (darp5) Review

About

The Darter Pro is a 15" linux-first ultrabook made by System76.

Purchase Date: 2019-04-01

Review Date: 2022-01-20



Review

Let's start with the elephant in the room. Yes, I know that System76 doesn't design their own laptop chassis, but I also know that they release custom firmware and work with Clevo and others on the designs and configurations so this is not just an off-the-self laptop you can buy from anyone else. I do however look forward to the day when they can design and product their own chassis.

Specs

If you want a full spec list, check out their website linked below. These are my thoughts on some specific specs that are worth noting.

The matte screen is between average to good quality and supports 1920×1080 FHD. While higher resolution would be nice these days, for this specific laptop I think the battery life would suffer too much with a higher resolution display. The display gets decently bright for indoor use, but is a bit dim for outdoor use.

The Darter Pro only supports Intel integrated graphics. System76 makes other laptops with Nvidia cards, so if you're looking for gaming or rendering check out their other offerings instead.

The battery life is sub-par. Check out the Battery section below for more details. Maybe their newer models are better?

Lots of ports, we love lots of ports on a laptop. Yes a Thunderbolt dock is amazing, but it's no replacement for ports.

Build Quality

I'm pleasantly surprised by the build quality of this laptop for only being partially metal. The top portions are a nice brushed metal look and feel, the hinge has held up better than almost any other laptop I've purchased from any major manufacturer ever, and the keyboard feels sturdy and solid.

My dislikes with the build are:

- They keys are a bit mushy feeling, despite also feeling well made.
- There's a lot of plastic on the bottom and around the screen
- The mouse buttons are pretty poor. They are very wide buttons and don't click consistently across their entire length

This is really a pretty short dislike list. My 2019 model only has a single USB-C 3.1 port, but I believe their newer models have two USB-C 3.2 ports. So while I'm sad with my single port, you won't be.

I also have firsthand experience that System76 stands behind their hardware. Over a year into ownership a screw came loose on the bottom and fell out before I got around to tightening it. The

screw was near the hinge and I could see the slight flexing would eventually cause hinge damage. I reached out to System76 and they had replacement screws in the mail to me at no cost that same week. No, the screws shouldn't have come loose, and yes sending replacements is not much to write home about, but since I had owned it for over a year, I'm not sure I would have been treated as well by many major laptop manufacturers.

Software

All of System 76's Laptops come with either their own Pop!_OS or Ubuntu preinstalled. Pop!_OS is a great, user-friendly, and stable OS that builds on what Ubuntu has done. I highly recommend you try out their distro if you get their laptop. You can always switch later if you prefer something else.

System76 has done a great job of improving hardware support over the old driver hunting days, plus has done a great job of providing native and open source firmware and other improvements you don't get when installing a distro on hardware that wasn't designed for it.

This isn't a review of Pop!_OS, but I do think it's a great distro with an exciting future.

Battery

Battery is the main drawback as I have never received good battery life with this laptop. My wife purchased an Lenovo laptop not long after I purchased the Darter Pro and her laptop's battery life blows me away. I wish I could get more than a few hours before I am critically low, even with power saving options enabled. Obviously batteries degrade over the years, but even to start it wasn't amazing. Before purchasing a new Darter Pro I would look around to see what people are getting for real-world battery life to see if it comes anywhere near the 9 hours they claim on their new model.

Support

I already talked a bit about their hardware support when I lost a screw, and maybe that wasn't worth mentioning. What is worth mentioning is that they provide software support as well. I reached out to their support one other time when I was having audio issues. Their support was quick to respond, collect logs from me, and begin troubleshooting what seemed like an OS issue. A quick fix later and I was good to go.

Decision □□

Since 2019 System76 has revamped the Darter Pro with a new chassis that has better ports and a better screen design. I cannot speak to the new design's build quality since their site is sparse on build details, but if it matches the quality of the 2019 model then it's still a solid machine.

The Darter Pro is light and portable, but has a large enough screen to be really productive on it. It's perfect for work and development as long as you don't have very high graphics needs that will tax the integrated graphics.

The Rest

My Purchase Price (including tax and shipping): **$1,995.60**

View the official Darter Pro site: https://system76.com/laptops/darter

Leave a Comment

Wyze Cameras Review

I've used several different Wyze cameras over the years (Cam V3, Cam OG, and Floodlight), and while each camera may work slightly differently, overall they all have the same issues. This page covers my most common issues with Wyze cameras and why I recommend choosing a different brand. I will cover some of the positives as well, but I don't believe they overcome the negatives.

Functionality

Connection Times

I've found all my Wyze cameras to take about 3 seconds to connect at the best of times. Many times it will take 15 seconds for unknown reasons. Sometimes a camera will just refuse to connect entirely for a while. Try again in a few minutes and it might work. I've had non-stop connection issues with all Wyze cameras I have owned over several years.

While writing up this page I opened up several cameras to check on various things. Nearly h**alf** of them either took close to a minute to load or failed entirely saying they were offline. All the cameras are well within wifi range.

App Issues

Over time as Wyze has updated their app, various issues have come and gone. One thing that is constant however are bugs. The most frustrating bugs for me have been several times where I have had to clear all the app cache and settings before it would load any of my cameras. It's not worth spending your time fighting a never ending battle with frustrating app problems.

Additionally, different generations of cameras have entirely different UIs within the app. Feature like viewing recorded alerts or viewing the SD card recordings exist in different places with entirely different interfaces, how fun!

No RTSP Support

One day in the future you may want to explore expanding beyond basic Wyze Cameras. If so, it would be nice to bring all your cameras under one roof. Wyze cameras do not support RTSP which means you cannot use 3rd party NVR systems to manage or view them. In my security camera journey I've come to realize that RTSP support is mandatory to not get locked into a company's ecosystem.

There are some bridges that can take Wyze cameras and create an RTSP stream from them to help solve this issue. I've never gotten them to work and it's a hacky solution at best. Instead, support a company that supports open standards like RTSP.

SD Card Support

This one should have been a positive, and it is... until it isn't. Writing to an SD cart is a good backup to the cloud event recordings, and being able to access these recordings remotely is nice as well. You will find that you only check the SD card recordings when you need to review something. One of these times you'll find that the SD card failed and Wyze never bothered to notify you, and so that important event you thought you had recorded isn't recorded.

This is a deal-breaker. You cannot use the SD card recordings for Wyze cameras if the records won't be there when you need them. This is just a false sense of security. I guess you just need to remember to check each camera daily to make sure it's still working.

You do need to purchase SD cards rated to be used for continual recording, but even still Wyze is hard on SD cards and they will fail a lot. It doesn't help that Wyze has had bugs in the past which caused SD cards to fail even faster than usual. The savings you gain through SD cards instead of paying for cloud storage or a better solution with an NVR are lost to SD card replacement costs.

FloodLight

There's not much to say here. The Wyze Floodlight is trash. the PIR sensor is trash. Don't get it, it doesn't work.

Notifications

Too Many Alerts

While you can choose which area of the camera's view to use for motion detection, there are still a lot of issues. In the past I regularly received notification alerts for motion that occurred outside of the detection zone.

Inside the detection zone you'll get alerts for waving tree branches or changes in sunlight constantly. Good luck adjusting it to your needs.

One of my outside cameras is configured to listen for glass breaking and gunshot sounds. I get on average one notification for one of the other when neither has ever happened. It's no surprise that the camera can't properly detect sound, the microphone quality is the worst I have ever heard. I legitimately think these cameras would be better if they had no microphone at all. Why pretend?

Too Few Alerts

"Wait, I thought there were too many alerts?" I hear you ask. Sometimes there are. Other times really obvious motion events are completely missed. I have a camera pointed at my front door with a somewhat narrow detection zone due to trees blowing in the breeze. It almost never alerts when we get a package delivered and it is put squarely in the middle of the detection zone.

I've also gone through periods where the app just didn't send me any notifications. Then some app update would happen a month later and I start getting them again.

The combination of too many and too few alerts means you never see what you want to see. It is a fool's errand to get these cameras tuned just right to not miss everything and also not overwhelm you.

Poor Detection

If there is a car in frame, every notification will be "Vehicle detected." Is your camera pointed at your driveway and the sun shines through the trees at a slightly different angle as it crosses the sky? "Vehicle detected"

Your dog runs right in front of the camera in perfect lighting, "Motion Detected". I hope you didn't get tired of the tons of unnecessary notifications and turn off general detections and only enable alert for Pets, because then you won't get any notification at all. The "Smart Detections" Wyze offers sound nice, but are unreliable.

Security

Wyze took 3 years to patch a security issue

https://www.bitdefender.com/files/News/CaseStudies/study/413/Bitdefender-PR-Whitepaper-WCam-creat5991-en-EN.pdf

Wyze discontinued camera rather than patch security issue

https://www.theverge.com/2022/1/27/22904844/wyze-discontinues-smart-security-camera-wyzecam-v1

Wyze let others see inside your home

https://www.theverge.com/2023/9/8/23865255/wyze-security-camera-feeds-web-view-issue

Wyze did it again

https://www.theverge.com/2024/2/19/24077233/wyze-security-camera-breach-13000-customers-events

Positives

Subscription price for multiple cameras

At $100 a year, Wyze Cam Unlimited is a good deal if you have handful of cameras, and the price won't go up as you add more.

Unfortunately sometimes the app loses your subscription information for a period of time and downgrades your features and notifications. For me generally things start working again a few hours later, but in the meantime I've missed event recordings and have to dig through the (hopefully not failed) SD card recordings to see what happened.

Subscription is optional

You can run these cameras without a subscription using an SD card. Even notifications are very basic and you don't get the unreliable "Smart Detection" events, just general motion events.

Summary

Wyze is too budget of an option to provide a decent product. Every aspect of the Wyze ecosystem is poorly designed or poorly implemented. Wyze introduces new products and new bugs faster than they fix existing ones. Wyze has not shown proper due care for security incidents, which is unacceptable for a device that can let others see inside your home. The cheap entry point is not worth the sacrifices.

So what do I recommend instead? I don't have a recommendation for you yet. I'm testing out some camera brands with RTSP support, starting with affordable models first. I am using Frigate NVR with a centralized hard drive to store all the recordings on. So far I'm getting faster connection times and better object detection with no annual fee, but I have yet to settle on a preferred affordable camera.

Keychron C1 & C2 Review

About

The Keychron C1 and Keychron C2 are entry level wired mechanical keyboards. The C2 is a full-sized layout which includes a number pad, while the C1 forgoes the numpad for a more compact footprint.

Purchase Date: 2021-12-21

Review Date: 2022-01-18



Review

I personally used the Keychron C2 with the brown switch (shown above). For those newer to mechanical keyboards (as I am myself), a quick overview of the switch types:

- **Red**: Light weight, smooth/linear, and more quiet. Popular for gaming.
- **Brown**: Tactile feed. More noise than red
- **Blue**: Tactile and Clicky. Noisier, but best feedback on button press.

This mechanical keyboard is well built and sturdy. There are ABS plastic keycaps (not ideal, but perfectly fine for the price-point) included for both Windows and Mac layouts. The included USB cable is high quality, braided, and USB-C on both ends!

Pay close attention when purchasing this keyboard as it comes with 3 switch options (listed above), various backlight options, as well as Hot-Swappable or non swappable keys. I would of course

recommend hot-swappable keys, but if you're looking to save money and don't ever want to change your key-caps, then you can skip it. Do note that the ABS keycaps it comes with will fade off well before the rest of the keyboard goes bad though.

As my personal intro to mechanical keyboards, I have no complaints about the design or layout, with one exception. I do not like how the top row, which contains the Function key as well as Media Keys, defaults to the Media Keys and only acts as F keys when the FN key is also pressed. The FN key is only on one side and I personally want to use F12 much more often than Volume up. I still have not adjusted to this, and it may just be me who prefers things this way.

Overall, I think for a Windows or Mac user you could not ask for a better keyboard for the price.

I however am a Linux user, and this keyboard does suffer some functionality issues under Linux. I was pretty shocked to find this out after purchasing, because the last time I had compatibility issues with a keyboard was... never. Someone will inform me I'm sure, but I cannot fathom the reason this keyboard would not work well in Linux out of the box, other than that Keychron must be trying to be a little too fancy behind the scenes.

Keychron pretends to solve this issue by pointing you to a generic Facebook group every chance they have. This is an extremely poor user experience.

Decision □□

If you are looking for an entry level mechanical keyboard, or you aren't really sure what a mechanical keyboard is but know you need a better quality keyboard, I recommend the Keychron C1 or C2 to Windows and Mac users.

For Linux users, while there are workaround to get things working as you'd expect them to work, I cannot recommend this keyboard. While yes, Linux users generally have the knowledge to enable these workarounds, I would recommend supporting a company that also supports your platform. Keychron as a company does not support the Linux community.

The Rest

My Purchase Price (including tax and shipping): **$54.49**

Product link: https://amzn.to/4fRZhLq

TicWatch GTH Review

About

The TicWatch GTH is a health-centric budget smartwatch packed with sensors and running a custom OS (not Wear OS).

Purchase Date: 2021-08-10

Review Date: 2022-01-17

q?_encoding=UTF8&ASIN=B08YJFSJXC&Format=_SL160_&ID=AsinImage&MarketPlace=US&Service

Review

The TicWatch GTH jumped out at me because of the large number of health features it packs in. The only other real smartwatch features it supports are notifications from your phone, and changeable watchfaces. You won't be installing any custom apps here, so expect a basic Fitbit rather than an Apple Watch.

Health Features

Skin temperature, blood oxygen level, heart rate, respiration rate, sleep tracking, step counter, workout detection (maybe more!). The sensors are where the GTH shines. I cannot speak to the accuracy of the sensors, but they record data at a frequent rate, and don't drain the battery. This is the reason you would buy this watch and it does deliver in this department. Through the companion app you can sync this data to a number of health services including both Google and Apple health.

The watch also has a moderate amount of built in exercise types you can choose from and while the watch does not support GPS, you can start a GPS track from the companion app on your phone if you will be bringing that along on your run/ride. While the number of exercise types supported is less than a Fitbit, my wife actually prefers how the GTH handles exercise tracking to that of the Fitbit Inspire.

Smart Watch Features

You can pick from a small set of predefined watch-faces. The selection is decent and changes with the season.

You can see notifications from your phone, but not respond to them. The font used by the watch is an atrocious monospaced font that doesn't allow much text to fit on the screen. It's difficult to overstate how much the font detracts from the rest of the watch. This is one of the main areas that I wish Mobvoi would push out an update for. There's no reason for the font to be as bad as it is.

That's about it smartwatch-wise. There are a few built in apps for things like the weather, but don't buy this watch if you're looking for a full-featured smartwatch. It's much closer to a Fitbit Tracker in terms of smartwatch features.

Battery Life

Expect several days of battery life, potentially up to a week. There is a battery-saver feature, but it limits the functionality of the watch so much that I find it not very useful. Unfortunately I do not believe you can prevent it from turning on automatically when the battery gets low.

Look and Feel

The screen is 360 x 320px, which does let you see the pixels, but is still crisper than many other watches, especially in this price range. The screen can also be a bit dim in the sunlight and there is a pretty thick bezel around the edges. However in this price range these are definitely acceptable trade-offs.

The overall watch design looks good and well-made, but it only comes in one color, so I hope you wanted it in black. Picking up a decent 3rd party watch band will really improve the look beyond the basic black rubberized one it comes with.

Connectivity and Companion App

This is where the TicWatch GTH falls flat. The Mobvoi companion app is worse than the terrible font the watch uses. The watch does not stay connected to the phone app for very long meaning your health data will stop syncing. You won't get any notice that the connection isn't working either. Using either the phone or the app to attempt to reconnect is a fool's errand as they provide no help or insight into how you might resolve the issue. The most recent time this happened to me I had to factory reset the watch AND uninstall/reinstall the phone app before it would re-pair. This is a deal-breaker for this watch unfortunately.

There have been no software updates released by Mobvoi since purchasing this watch.

Decision □□

Despite delivering a great package with all the health sensors you would want, the lack of care that Mobvoi has put into resolving the issues there are is a deal-breaker here. As a standalone health watch, the GTH is a great device, especially for the money, but the utter failure of Mobvoi to improve notifications or fix basic syncing functionality shows that the company has moved on from this device, and you probably should too.

If Mobvoi pushed out an update improving the notification font and fixing the connectivity issues I would heartily recommend this watch to those primarily looking for health features in their watch.

The Rest

My Purchase Price (including tax and shipping): **$55.99**

View the official Ticwatch GTH site: https://www.mobvoi.com/us/pages/ticwatchgth



Tapo C720 Floodlight Review - Also known as Tapo TC55

About

The Tapo C720 (The Tapo TC55 is the exact same thing) is a combination floodlight and Tapo security camera. It is designed for mounting to an electrical box or replacing an existing floodlight. Connection requires connecting bare wires and it does not plug directly into an outlet.



Review

Installation

The installation process of this floodlight is quite easy. Easier than other floodlights even. Tapo provides a special mount that you screw in and attach the wires to first. This can be done without any wire nuts and avoids needing to hold the entire floodlight while connecting!

Once the mount is screwed into your electrical box and the wires connected, you just push the floodlight on top of it and screw it down. I do wish the floodlight "snapped" onto the mount a little better though as I had to fiddle to get it positioned correctly.

Overall this process took just a couple of minutes to remove an old floodlight and install this one.

The Good

In the Tapo app this floodlight has good configuration options for brightness and what types of events and what areas should trigger the floodlight.

The PIR sensor has 3 detection zones (left, center, right) that can be enabled/disabled and an overall sensitivity to adjust.

The camera can also be used to set custom detection areas and you can select which types of motion on the video should trigger the light as well. Anything from none, to all motion, to specific objects like people or dogs. You also get this full control over which events trigger notifications in the app.

The camera and lights are very adjustable (physically) and can be pointed in many more directions than some other floodlights.

The camera has a quite wide field of view. They claim 150 degrees and who am I to disagree, I traveled the world and the seven seas... Sorry I got off topic there. A floodlight cam generally needs a good field of view and a high resolution (2K) to take advantage of that, so this delivers there.

The Tapo app is pretty good, and I will review the app and other common Tapo camera features separately and link that here. In short, cameras generally connect quickly and the app is way more reliable than the Wyze app. In addition Tapo wired cameras support RTSP so you can use your favorite NVR instead of Tapo if desired.

The Okay

The camera quality is good, but not amazing. This is a bit of a nit-pick for the price-range, but motion can sometimes have artifacts visible in the recordings. The video resolution of 2560x1440 is great and pretty sharp. If you find yours not to be sharp, be sure to check the Video Quality settings as sometimes Tapo defaults to a lower resolution by default for some strange reason. You paid for 2K quality, why would you want less?

The special/convenient mount Tapo provides can cause issues with some mounting configurations that other floodlights do not. The mounting bracket itself is not sealed or water resistant and can

leave gaps for water to get into the electrical box. The floodlight itself that attaches to the bracket is waterproof and has gaskets, but you may need to caulk around the bracket to avoid water intrusion. Most of these issues could have been prevented if the back of the mounting bracket also had a gasket.

The design of the mount can also causes the floodlight to not be as secure in some situations because it uses a single central screw. There are screw positions available along the sides to further secure it or anchor it directly into a wall, but my electrical boxes are mounted at an angle so I can only use the central screw to mount it.

If you have a flush, well mounted electrical box then the mounting hardware is a breeze and should work flawlessly, but in other situations it works, just not as well as traditional hardware.

The Bad

The floodlight is either on or off. There is no setting to leave the light on low and then raise the brightness when an object is detected.

Because the PIR sensor is on the bottom of the camera, adjusting the camera position adjusts the PIR detection area as well. If I turn the camera 90 degrees left to look along a wall, the PIR can no longer see along the wall to the right. This may or may not be an issue for you, and I have not seen any floodlight cameras that allow the PIR sensor to point somewhere other than where the camera is pointed.

You can not daisy chain another camera off of this floodlight. This was a neat feature of the Wyze floodlight (The only neat feature of it). If you need other cameras in the area, your options are to run them to another outlet, tap them straight into the same electrical box and potentially lose some waterproofing, or use a battery/solar style camera.

The camera reset button is exposed for anyone to press. Oddly enough it's mounted on a screwed in cover to protect any SD card you may have inserted, but I don't understand why they didn't leave the button under that safety cover too.

Decision □□

Floodlight cameras can be a bit expensive. When this floodlight goes on sale it's definitely worth the purchase. It also works much better than the floodlight cameras I have tried from Wyze.

If you're looking for a floodlight/camera combo, this is a great choice and better than others I have tried. If you just need a standard floodlight with PIR sensor, I would stick with a traditional floodlight.

The Rest

My Purchase Price: This was a gift, but sells between $100 - $150

Tapo C720 product link: https://amzn.to/4j1Ndd6

Tapo Mini Smart Wi-Fi Plug Warning

This is not a full review of the Tapo Wifi plugs, this page is a warning about a potentially dangerous yet common failure mode for Tapo wifi plugs that all owners need to be aware of.



The Problem

Reports online show that many models of Tapo Wifi plug have a high failure rate. Rather than failing in OFF mode, they fail in a way that causes them to rapidly cycle ON and OFF continuously forever.

This appears to happen due to a failed capacitor inside the device.

Many owners (myself included) report as many as 30-60% of their Tapo smart plugs have failed in this way within 1 to 2 years of purchase.

The Danger

While you need to be thoughtful of what devices are plugged into any smart plug, these Tapo plugs pose an additional risk.

The rapid ON-OFF cycling can damage devices attached to the plug or cause safety measures in attached devices to not work properly leading to damage/failure of the attached device. There may also be safety and fire impacts to some attached devices from the rapid power cycling.

You may not notice the failed plug for hours to days during which time the power will by cycling **hundreds of times per minute**.

Affected Models

- P110
- P110M
- P125
- P125M
- KP105
- KP115

Additional models may also be affected. Contact Me if you find other affected models.

Reports

- https://community.tp-link.com/en/home/forum/topic/711406
- https://www.reddit.com/r/Tapo/comments/17897co/p110_rapid_on_and_off/
- https://community.tp-link.com/en/smart-home/forum/topic/594886

What To Do?

1. Contact Tapo to report the issue if it happens to you. Even if your device is out of warranty, they need to be informed.
    1. Reporting to your local/state/country consumer safety organization as well if any damage occurred
2. DO NOT use this device with sensitive electronics or devices with high power draw
3. Consider not using affected Tapo products at all. There are likely more models affected than just the ones identified here.

Leave a Comment

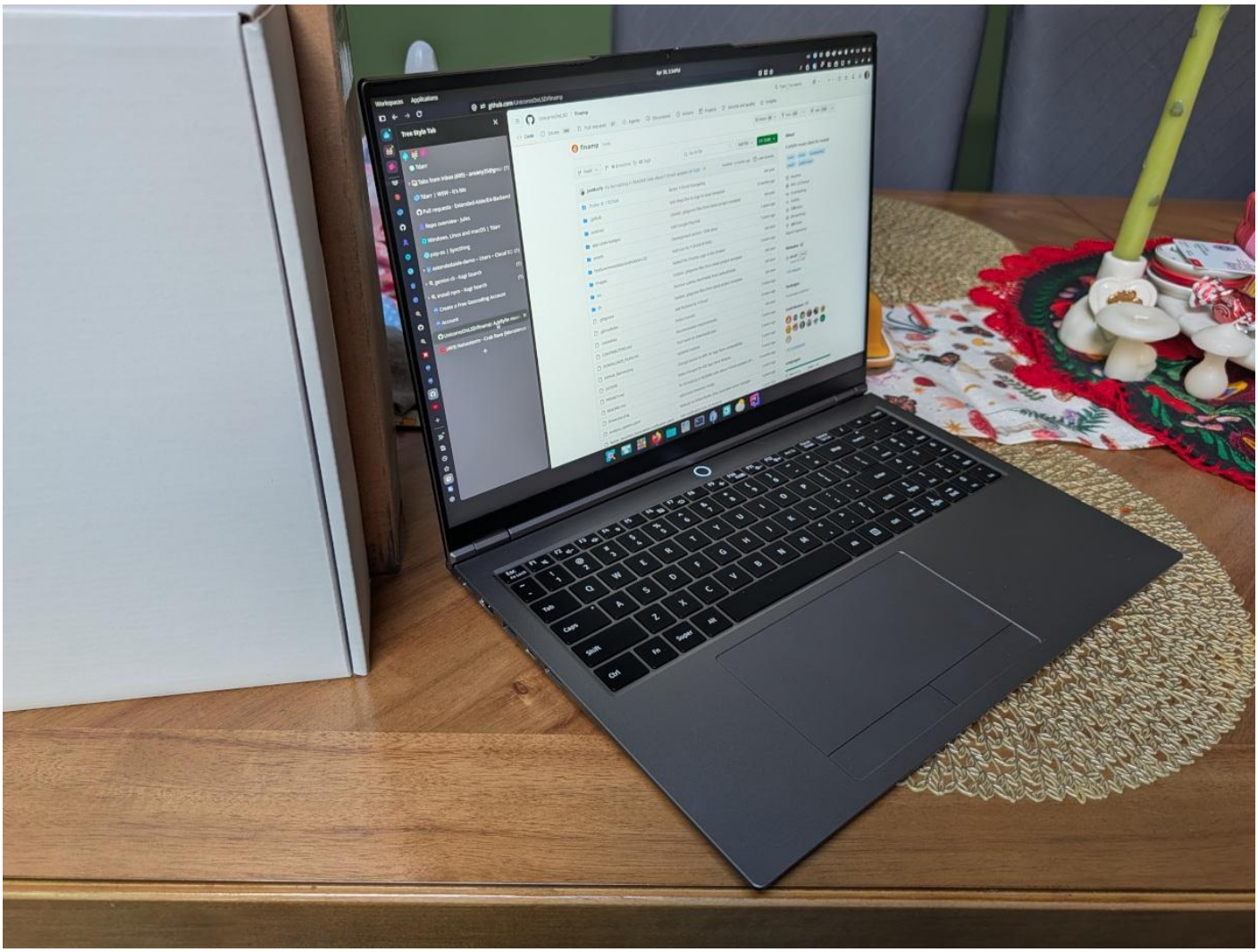
System76 Pangolin Pro (panp16) Review

The Pangolin Pro 16 is a new linux-first 16 inch laptop with an AMD Ryzen AI 7 350 processor and a 2K LTPS display at 16:10.

I will continue to expand this review as I use the laptop more.

Purchase Date: 2026-04-23

Review Date: 2026-04-30 (Review Updated 2026-05-26)



First Impressions

Build Quality

The build quality of the Pangolin Pro is good overall, but not super high end. In general the metal enclosure is solid, but the screen hinges feel so weak and wobbly that it affects the feel of the entire laptop. I am very confident in saying these hinges will be the first thing to fail on this laptop and will do so when it would otherwise have years of useful life left. This is a major bummer and I wish that System76 would focus on this more. I've had a previous System76 laptop hinge fail and it's obvious to me that it will happen again.

The track-pad is also underwhelming. It has separated left/right click buttons that are too stiff and the feel of the track-pad itself, while large enough, is nothing special.

Otherwise the case itself does feel sturdy and the keyboard is nice.

Battery

So far the battery life has been great. I can comfortably work all day on battery, or leave the laptop for a while and come back knowing I will still have plenty of battery to get me through my work. This is exactly what I was looking for.

Charging

The devices comes with a 100W charging brick that works well. However the device refuses to charge on anything slower. This is frustrating because I have plenty of 65W chargers around that work fine for everything else, but which I can no longer use with my laptop. The bottom sticker does warn about this, but I don't see any indication of this before purchase of the laptop.

Ports

I appreciate that the Pangolin Pro comes with an OCuLink port. I have not used or tested it, but it was a selling point for me as I hope to use it in the future.

While I don't use wired Ethernet very often, I love that it's included for when I want it requiring a dongle and having to use up a precious USB-C port.

Speaking of USB-C, I have another complaint. There are 2 USB-C ports and they are both on the same side of the device. It is **so** much nicer to have a USB-C port on either side and be able to pick the side that is more convenient for charging or a dock/monitor. Every System76 laptop is

inconsistent with USB-C port placement.

As for USB-A, I don't need 3 USB-A ports. Turn one of them into another USB-C port and all of my port complains go away. Even 2 C ports and 2 A ports would be great, one on each side.

Audio

With my minimal usage so far, the side facing speakers are on the low end of acceptable. They are at least better than the lowest end of laptop speakers, but significantly worse than what modern premium laptops provide (even the Dell XPS is better).

Screen

To me the screen looks relatively crisp and bright. It's a good screen. The brightness seems on par with average laptop screens which it can be used outside, but only under certain conditions. More brightness would have been appreciated. I have heard other complain about the colors, but I am not discerning enough to notice and issue there.

Software, Firmware, and Pop!_OS

I received this device with the latest Pop!_OS 24.04 with the COSMIC desktop. I've used Pop!_OS before COSMIC was introduced on other laptops. The feedback below may be related to COSMIC or related to the laptop and its firmware, I am not identifying the specific causes.

Wi-Fi

This laptop comes with a MediaTek MT7922 chip, which I can say from experience is trash, or the drivers are trash. My laptop was unusable for nearly a month while I worked with System76 support to identify a series of Wifi and sleep issues. In the end they were all caused by the MediaTek chip and I was eventually sent a replacement card, the Intel BE202. Good luck with the MediaTek chip, it may work for some Wifi networks but not others. This was not an acceptable situation for a laptop for me, but thankfully System76 support eventually came through with a warranty replacement card before I gave up and returned the entire laptop.

Sleep

The only sleep issues I have had occurred with the MediaTek MT7922 card.

COSMIC

While COSMIC is still a bit under-baked and missing some features, by the time I started using it the main bugs have been ironed out and I enjoy it. I'm glad to see System76 building a new option

in the desktop environment space.

COSMIC Files

The COSMIC Files app sometimes takes MINUTES to open and is pretty bare-bones. I will be eagerly awaiting improvements.

COSMIC Store

A good replacement for the older Pop Shop that solves some of the issues it had. However as this app is new it has it's own issues. The main one is that it can takes AGES to search for an app. Search for an app by name and you will see "No Results." But notice there's a loading icon in the upper right. When that finally completes you'll see the result you searched for. The speed and UX while things are loading could be improved here.

Coreboot

I naively assumed that all System76 laptops had open firmware and supported Coreboot. I thought that was one of their main selling points.

I was wrong, this device does not have open firmware and does not support Coreboot. It is possible it may get an update in the future, but there is no guarantee and I was shocked to find out this was the case.

Support

I've had great experiences with System76 support in the past with a previous laptop. Due to the Wifi and Sleep issues this new laptop had straight out of the box I've needed to work with their support again, which has been frustrating. While System76 claims they still use humans for support, I would put money on the support I received being an LLM, which had all the pitfalls of LLMs. It lead me down a pointless path of config changes and tests less and less related to my core issue. After several weeks of getting nowhere and being on the verge of returning the laptop my issue was escalated and they sent out a replacement Wifi card.

My support experience this time was a sad reminder of the AI times we live in.

Summary

I'm a bit disappointed with this offering from System76. I want System76 to succeed and I want more great Linux laptop options and support. I've begun to understand the common System76 complaint that they are just "rebranded Clevos." Yes, System76 does a lot of good work, but the physical build quality and software support of a brand new laptop from System76 is currently a

sub-par experience. I hope this laptop serves me well for many years to come, but I've experienced more negatives than positives with it in the first month of use.

As a quick review, these things don't work on a brand new laptop straight out of the box (with updates applied):

1. WiFi
2. Suspend/Resume
3. Files App

I bought a System76 Darter Pro back in 2019 and the hinge broke several years back, It's a shame the hinge quality has not improved since then.

View the official Pangolin Pro site: https://system76.com/laptops/pangolin-pro

Leave a Comment