



"Recommended"

It became a trusty friend and I would highly recommend it to anyone who needs a robust and rugged laptop for fieldwork. The night vision capability was invaluable and saved a lot of time and rework back at base.

Case Study – Carl Portman Sand, Sea and Snakes The Getac B300 Goes Down Under

Background

As a lover of natural history, and entomology in particular, I take as many opportunities as I can to see animals and plants in their natural environments. I am fascinated and intrigued by rainforest environments and I had a burning desire to visit the oldest one on the planet. The Queensland forests have existed for some 120 million years.

When Australia broke free from Antarctica about 50 million years ago it carried with it a cargo of living plants and animals. It is the only rainforest left in Australia and represents only 0.01% of the total land mass – so it is incredibly important.

This is a place where rainforest meets the sea. It is a land of strange creatures such as the duck billed platypus, the cassowary, and the mudskipper, and contains some of the oldest plants on earth such as cycads which are survivors from millions of years ago.

The Daintree area is the jewel of tropical north

Queensland and much of it is inaccessible wilderness. It was named in honor of an Englishman, Richard Daintree, who never actually saw it! The environment is hot and humid and has one of the wettest climates in Australia.

I went in November however, just before the wet season and the temperature was always between 28° and 33° C. I wanted to take a laptop computer with me to enable me to input work in the field as it happened – and this included photographs. Any old computer would not do and would fall apart in the unforgiving environment that I would be in (the rainforest is a war zone for the flora and fauna it contains). If you stand still for too long here something will grow on you.

Getac kindly accepted my request to loan a laptop and try it out in rainforest conditions. Here are my thoughts then on the B300. This PC is built for rugged environments and usage. It had its first test at Heathrow airport when the rollers going through the x-ray machine decided to reverse and spew it back out and onto the floor! Okay, it was



(Figure 1) Tropical Rainforest at Kuranda, Queensland

in a padded bag but nevertheless other laptops may have called it a day there and then. Fortunately there was no problem for the B300. It was interesting to note, upon my arrival at Darwin airport that everyone who had laptops had to take them out of cases before they were processed through the x-ray machine. The young lady operating the machine saw the Getac, picked it up and said 'hey, that's a very nice laptop' before letting it go. I felt superior for a fleeting moment as I looked around at the other 'basic' models.



(Figure 2) Waterproof and dust resistance

What environment did I use it in?

The answer is anywhere I could. This included the beach in the searing hot sun. I left it in the sand and washed it in the sea. It was in the rainforest by day and night in hot humid conditions and occasional rain. It was left on rainforest floor leaf litter and sand and soil as well as getting wet on one particular occasion when the heavens opened for a short while.

What was good about it?

I actually like the physical look of the laptop first and foremost. It is fairly heavy at 3.5kgs but needs to be to withstand some of the rigors of its life. I especially like the very neat night vision capability where the keyboard glows red to enable one to continue working even in total darkness. This proved a useful resource when hunting for the Amethystine python.

It loaded quickly and has other useful functions such as eco standby and many special function keys. All the sockets and ports are covered and the CD tray is well protected too.

Built with a magnesium alloy case, I had every confidence that the Getac would be up to the job in a tough environment. It has

a long battery life, reportedly up to 12 hours but I did not fully test this on this trip. It went through many potentially harmful x-ray machines on this trip with no adverse affects to any software or documents. Finally, although I never used it, the laptop has fingerprint recognition, which I had never seen before.

A REPORT FROM THE FIELD – THE PYTHON AND THE FROG!

I spent an evening looking for the elusive Amethystine python (*Morelia amethystina*). This beautiful animal is not potentially dangerous as it does not have venom, but it suffocates its prey which includes mice, frogs, birds and even domestic chickens. They will readily bite however and do have a sharp row of teeth. With Getac in hand I set off to find one. (Figure 3)

You have to be careful in a tropical rainforest at night and always expect the unexpected. I could come across the wrong snake – a death adder or One can spend days in the forest and not find a snake but luckily within an hour there was one sitting right in front of me.

Not only that but it was the species I was hoping to find. A freshly shed python (Figure 5) stayed quite still as I approached and it seemed quite calm so I was pleased to be able to handle it calmly (Figure 6) and without getting it too excited as they are usually prone to biting. I asked my companion to hold the snake's head whilst I got a photo, and thanks to having the Getac I was soon able to download the picture using the red night-site keyboard.

This is the first time I have used a laptop in the field (Figure 7) and it was actually rather useful to input photos and other data in real time instead of having to write it all down to regurgitate later. I also used this neat facility on the flight back when all the cabin lights were off – a nice touch from Getac. And there were a few enquiring, admiring glances from passengers in the seats surrounding me too. I ventured deeper into the forest and saw a huge flying fox fruit bat with a one-meter wingspan in front of me. There were many other amazing animals and plants too, such as giant cluster fig trees with huge buttress roots, and



(Figure 3)

also man-groves and glorious ancient ferns. It was whilst I was inspecting such a fern that I turned around to find a large white-lipped tree frog (*Litoria infrafrenata*) had taken a liking to the B300 (Figure 8) and was perching on the keyboard.



(Figure 4)

I had turned the night light off whilst I went away so it must have been attracted by the screen or the fact that something 'new' was in its environment. These creatures are not often seen so it was a nice surprise, but I gently took it off, set it aside, and made ready to work. But sure enough, with one giant leap, the little star landed on the screen (Figure 9) and seemed very happy there. I just ignored it and scribbled some notes in my pocket book. I then continued to work although it was terribly hot by then (Figure 10) and I was about ready to go when he popped up again behind the screen (Figure 11) and proceeded to hold on as if to say 'this is mine mate'. So – even the rainforest frogs of tropical Queensland are impressed by the B300, which is praise indeed.

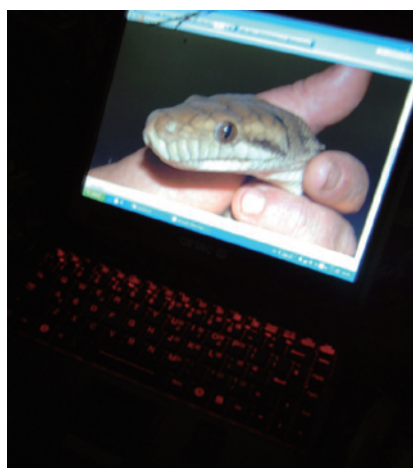
Finally, even with the best of intentions I could not carry the Getac around with me all the time. The weight of that plus camera equipment and bottles of water was too much on a boiling night. However I was perfectly happy to leave it at a marked place

(I was in the middle of nowhere after all) and return to it on my way back. With a normal laptop I would have worried about rain or soil getting into the machine and also the possibility of ants or other small animals getting in and possibly causing some damage.

Not so with the B300 thankfully, and I returned to find that something had been mooching around it (Figure 12) but the laptop was perfectly safe. My thanks to Getac for having the courage to loan this excellent machine to a complete stranger in the name of doing something different!



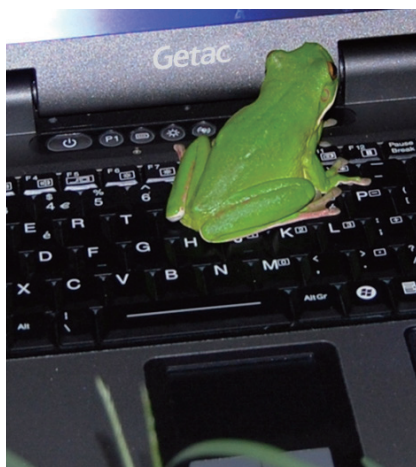
(Figure 5)



(Figure 6)



(Figure 7)



(Figure 8)



(Figure 9)



(Figure 10)



(Figure 11)



(Figure 12)



Biography of Carl Portman carlportman@hotmail.com

- Employee of The Ministry of Defense in the UK and Germany
- British Chess Federation County Master
- Member of the British Tarantula Society
- Hobbies: Chess and arachnology. Has bred rare and endangered species.
- Author of the book 'Fangs for the Memories: the Search for Tarantulas in Ecuador'
- Motto in life: 'Get up, get dressed, and get out there'





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