

# Lite-On 8x External DVD/CD Writer

Michael Fereday looks at a simple way to add optical media support to a netbook

External optical drives have always been a popular option especially with the ease of use when moving the device from one system to another. They also make an excellent choice when adding increased functionality to a netbook. I've recently been looking at such an optical device from Lite-On. This is the company's 8X External Top-load DVD/CD Writer model.

Small and light enough to make it an ideal portable companion for your chosen netbook/notebook,

this lacquered black unit is rugged enough to withstand normal activity when in transit. Connection to this optical writer to your system is via a supplied 20cm USB lead, which can reside in a channel located on the base of the unit when not required. Unlike some drives, this Lite-On model only requires a single USB connection to provide both data and power needs. Generally my tests confirmed this when the drive was connected directly to the system, although I did encounter some jerkiness when playing a DVD movie while using a powered USB hub.

Using SuperAllWrite technology, this writer supports DVD+-R, DVD+-R9, DVD-RAM and DVD+-RW media at speeds of up to 8x plus CD-R and CD-RW with a speed boost of 24x. Built into the product are Smart-Burn and Smart-X technology to improve its write and read performance.

As the product's title indicates, this is a top-loading device. Forming part of the unit's lid is a slider catch, which holds it in place when in its closed state. Positioned either side of the disk bay are two finger-sized

depressions, which allow you to remove or place a disc without needing to touch the disc's surface area. When in operation, an LED light on the front of the drive will flash to remind you not to attempt to remove the disk.

To help take advantage of the functionality of this optical writer, Lite-On has bundled copies of Nero 8 Essentials for Windows use and Nero Linux 3 Essentials - useful when using this is well-designed product to fulfil your optical read and write needs.

**mm** Michael Fereday

## Zbox HD-ID11

Tom Bushnell sees a mini PC with an air of ION about it

### Details

Price: £189  
 Manufacturer: Zotac International Limited  
 Tel: (852) 2799 8011  
 Website: www.zotac.com

### Ratings

Quality: ★★★★★★☆☆  
 Value: ★★★★★★☆☆

Small but functional, the Zbox fulfils the nettop role perfectly

**OVERALL**  
**7**

The idea was simple: create a system from lost-cost components with a high power-to-performance ratio. It seems Zotac likes the sound of such a platform, which is why we're looking at the Zbox today.

Wrapped in a pretty case with gloss-black sides and a silvery

central bezel, the Zbox takes up very little space for the performance it promises. Capable of being attached to the back of a suitable monitor with the included mount, one can also hide it out of sight and mind. Just pop the supplied cartridge on the Vesa mount and click the Zbox into place.

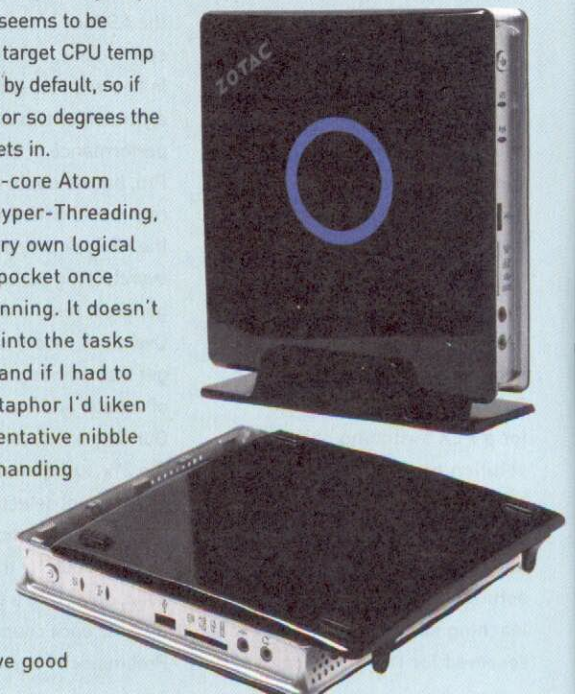
Since all models of Zbox are barebones systems, you'll need to supply your own 2.5" SATA hard disk and DDR2 SODIMM memory, and for this I've chosen a 30GB SSD and 1GB of PC2-6400 RAM. There are two thumbscrews on the side which, when removed, allow the case lid to pop open, providing access to the innards. Once inside you'll find a laptop-sized PWM fan - an unexpected feature promising a quiet computing experience. Despite this, the Zbox can still sound like a jet engine if the going

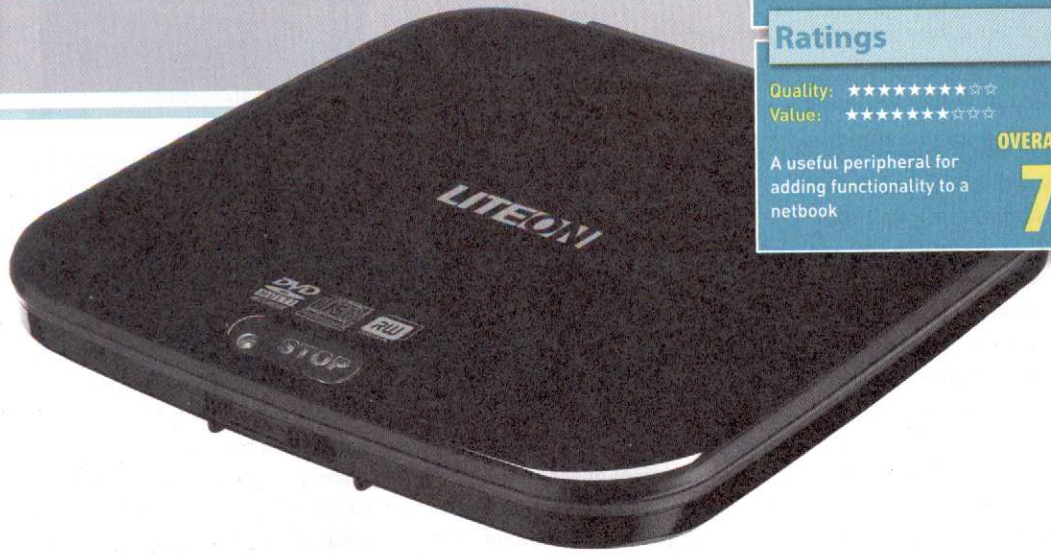
gets tough - spooling up until you're sure it's about to explode. However, when not severely taxed, it's pretty much silent. This seems to be because the BIOS target CPU temp is ambitiously low by default, so if you raise it by ten or so degrees the quietness really sets in.

Since the dual-core Atom D510 supports Hyper-Threading, you have your very own logical quad-core-in-a-pocket once you're up and running. It doesn't voraciously tear into the tasks it's set, though, and if I had to continue the metaphor I'd liken it to perhaps a tentative nibble on the more demanding applications. I found disabling Hyper-Threading to 'recombine' the logical CPUs gave good

3dMark 03	
Game Tests	7500
CPU Tests	194
Overall	7473

▼ The lovely blue ring that fades in and out with system power was a pleasant surprise.





**Details**

Price: £38  
 Manufacturer: Lite-On  
 Website: www.Lite-Onit.com  
 Required spec: Windows 2000 or later, USB port

**Ratings**

Quality: ★★★★★☆☆  
 Value: ★★★★★☆☆

**OVERALL**  
**7**

A useful peripheral for adding functionality to a netbook

**PRINT**  
**COPY**  
**SCAN**  
**FAX**



**Model Specs (As Reviewed)**

- Intel Atom D510 1.6GHz CPU
- 1x 200-pin DDR2 SODIMM slot (667-800MHz) (Added)
- 1x 2.5" SATA HDD slot (Added)
- NVidia GT218 512MB DDR3 graphics
- 802.11b/g/n wi-fi
- 1Gbps Ethernet

3dMark 06	
SM2.0	1074
HDR/SM3.0	1014
CPU	880
Overall	2539

CustomPC Suite 2007	
Image Editing	197
Video Encoding	317
Multitasking	116
Overall	210

performance increases in single-threaded situations.

In terms of connectivity, we're a little spoilt for choice on such a small chassis. The silver bezel is festooned with as many ports as you could wish for, and the built-in wireless-n networking means its bang up to date for high-speed wire-free communication.

Of course, it was prudent to switch to Ethernet to try some online gaming and tax the ION GPU, too. This is interesting, though: the Zbox is actually one of the 'second-generation' ION platforms. There's a licensing issue between NVidia and Intel that prevents NVidia employing the designs it used

on older Atoms. So rather than a bespoke chip to chat to the Atom CPU, new ION platforms must hang a chip off the NM10 Express chipset through which the new Atom chips communicate.

Luckily there are four PCI-E 1.0 lanes on this chipset to which one could tie a GPU, but inevitably only one has been used for this in the Zbox. The others are absorbed by other PCI-E devices. That's very little bandwidth for modern graphics, so dedicated memory is included to take the strain off the system RAM and that weedy communication channel. It really does help it claw some frames per second out of the system,

but despite reasonably smooth performance in older games like Half-Life 2, the Zbox really isn't for gaming, with the built-in GT218 roughly matching the performance of a NVidia's GT 210 card.

That won't stop it accelerating HD video for you, though, and with the right (free) software, HD movie formats play just fine. Between that and the optical and HDMI ports, you have a great media system to hide around the telly if you fancy a small-footprint home cinema solution. This really seems to be what the Zbox is about - consuming lots of media and fluid web browsing. And in these it excels.

**Tom Bushnell**

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