



## Tech Talk

### Microsoft Surface Pro 4 ©

by John McCarthy

Hi and welcome once again to 'Tech Talk'. Those of you who have been faithful listeners since the very beginnings of EnglishWaves.fr may remember that the very first programme, what we refer to in the broadcasting vernacular as 'the pilot,' was dedicated to the iPad, and since then Tech Talk presenters have also taken a look at the Apple Watch and the iPhone 6s. Well, today we're having a swift gander at the other side of the coin, as recently I managed to borrow a Microsoft Surface Pro 4 for the purposes of a test and review. This is, as the name suggests, the fourth incarnation of the machine that Microsoft pitches as "a tablet that can replace your laptop." Prices currently on their website show that the entry model is available from €999, and from there move up to what some may consider an exorbitant €2449 for the top-of-the-range Intel Core i7 model loaded with all the bells and whistles. I opted for the mid-range Intel Core i5 with 256GB of solid state storage and 8 GB of RAM; this seemed, for my requirements at any rate, the most appropriate and sensible choice, and all for a meager €1449!

Let's begin with the aesthetics. The all-magnesium unibody casing is very eye-catching and feels silky-smooth to the touch. The display is very attractive; size and resolution have evolved from earlier models and screen real estate is now 12.3" with 2,736 x 1824 pixels – that's 267 pixels per inch, a little better than its rival the iPad Pro. The aspect ratio is 3:2, which is the same as a standard piece of A4 paper, and this makes the Surface Pro 4 particularly agreeable for reading e-books and PDFs, or of course working on any designs intended eventually for paper use. As I say, the display looks bright and beautiful, and the high resolution ensures that the user won't see individual pixels, even when reading ordinary black text on a white background. Apple calls this kind of very high resolution 'retina', and this now features throughout most of their product range. Microsoft calls it 'PixelSense', and to my old and weary bespectacled eyes, it seems pretty much the same thing when comparing the two. The truth is that it provides very realistic-looking videos and brings a great vibrancy to photos and games.

Included by default is the touchscreen stylus, magnetically attached to the tablet's edge. This 'pen' has over 1,000 levels of pressure sensitivity, a long, single button on the stem, a rubber on the top (which has a reassuringly smudgy feel) and performance is precise and impressive. I handed the SP4 to one of my friends, a professional artist and graphic designer, who thought the pressure sensitivity was more than adequate, with the caveat that it wasn't quite as responsive as some of the Wacom tablets he uses on a daily basis to bring home the bacon.

As for connectivity, the Surface Pro 4 fits in a single USB 3.0 port, a MiniDisplay for video, a microSD card slot, and an audio jack. So much for the specifications: does the actual product really cut the mustard?

The major problem is that no matter how extensive the damage to your wallet, after you've opened the box and set it up, one extremely important ingredient will be missing, requiring a further dip into your hard-earned funds. The Type Cover, a slim keyboard and screen protector, is still sold separately, even if you've opted for the most expensive configuration, and yet it remains an essential, integral part of the Surface ecosystem. And a further €150-odd to fork out. This connects via magnetic hinge along the bottom of the tablet, and folds shut over the cover for easy transport. All the advertising material I've seen features the SP4 with the keyboard cover attached. For such a supposedly premium product with a premium price, it's an omission that's frankly surprising. One design issue that remains to sort out is that with the keyboard attached it works well typing on a flat surface, but in a crowded RER or airline seat, it's very problematic. Laptop, in the real definition of the word, it most certainly isn't.

As a tablet, you'd expect the Surface Pro 4 to run for most of the day, but battery life proved to be a little disappointing. I managed a maximum of six and a half hours, which frankly for most people will be enough, but not for those of you who are intensive power-hungry users.

In conclusion, the SP4 is a lightweight and portable device which can go with you anywhere, although try as hard as you might it will never feel comfortable on your lap. It is, however, the closest we've come to using a tablet as a fully functioning laptop. The price still remains a serious obstacle; instead of the entry model, you could buy a Dell laptop and an iPad for the same price, but of course at the expense of having to lug both around and coordinate your data between them.

Personally, I subscribe to an Apple ecosystem and have done for years, but I have to admit that the Surface is an excellent machine, so if I wanted a Windows mobile device, I would this very moment be writing to Santa to let him know what a good boy I've been throughout the year, and asking him to leave me one in the Christmas stocking.

And on that bright note we come to the end of this edition of Tech Talk. Hope you enjoyed the programme and indeed that you'll join me next time here on EnglishWaves.fr. Bye for now.