

PC Guardian commission independent review on its locks and gains 4* rating

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PC Guardian, suppliers of high quality anti-theft devices for computer products, has commissioned an independent review of its notebook security, desktop security and drive access control products. The high quality anti-theft devices feature flexible keying options, including master keying systems, and are widely adopted as corporate standards.

Products reviewed were:

- ComboLock 2200 £19.95
- Ultra 2001 £27.95
- Double Guardian 1242 £44.95

Notebook computers are costly items, but there is a hidden side to notebook theft, since users must also replace their notebook's software, as well as the data stored on their hard drive. Losing company data can be a serious matter, especially if customer data is involved. The employee and company concerned could be in breach of the Data Protection Act or, perhaps worse, the data on the notebook could cause financial loss to the company concerned.

The good news is that modern notebooks are easy to secure to a nearby immovable object, such as a desk leg or, as increasingly found as an option on modern office furniture, via a desktop fixing post.

Of the three types of notebook cable locks available (sonic, key or combination lock based) sonic cable locks are the easiest to disable, either taking a screwdriver-assisted battery removal approach, or a drill plus water/syrup injection technique.

This latter approach is one commonly used by criminals to disable modern house alarms. It works. Just ask the police.

Key or combination cable locks are more difficult to crack. Whilst early key cable locks seen in the 1990s were relatively easy to defeat using a hollowed-out pen cap, today's key-based systems are more sophisticated, using indentations and cut-outs to create multiple key permutations for a given type of lock.

The PC Guardian ComboLock 2200 has a single combination lock-based plug on one end of a six foot long quarter-inch plastic-coated steel cable with a loop at the other end. The loop is secured by a zinc-based metal collar. "We were impressed to see the lock had four numbers, rather than three seen on the

competition, such as the Kensington equivalent. With a hacksaw (we tried) it's almost impossible. Several IT security magazines report a handheld electric saw as taking 15 minutes to cut through the cable. We also discovered that heavy-duty bolt cutters - even the type seen in the 1998 Vinnie Jones movie, Lock, Stock and two Smoking Barrels - cannot cut through the steel cable. Professional thieves with specialist equipment, then, would be slowed down by this cable. Opportunist thieves, typified by break-ins to offices, would be put off.

Verdict: "For £19.95, this is a no-brainer for an office or home notebook user. If one opportunistic theft is thwarted, the cable will have paid for itself in terms of insurance premium savings."

The PC Guardian Notebook Guardian Ultra 2001 has a six foot cable with a zinc collar-based loop at one end, with the lock itself at the other. Two indented, but duplicate, keys are supplied, and, to ensure the lock is a snug fit to the notebook, PC Guardian supplies a couple of hardened grommets to ensure the cable lock fits directly into the notebook's socket. If the grommets aren't fitted, and the lock isn't a snug fit, a heavy duty screwdriver could be used to pry the cable free of the notebook. Yes, some damage would be caused, but for a petty thief this is no major problem.

Verdict: "The Ultra 2001 cable is a solid investment for high risk situations such as offices open to the public, especially where kids or teenagers have access, since a key lock is less attractive than a combination lock system.

The third product reviewed was the PC Guardian Double Guardian, a twin lock system with a lock at either end of the quarter inch plastic coated steel cable. No cable loops are involved, making the cable suitable for securing two notebooks together or, more likely, a notebook to an adhesive mount mini-plate.

Verdict: "Overall, we were impressed with the Double Guardian. The provision of lockable plugs at each end of the cable makes for a neater security solution."

Summary:

Despite its lower price, the ComboLock 2200 is the most flexible solution of all. The combination lock is highly secure and, whilst not as secure as a lockable system, is more than sufficient to dissuade opportunistic thieves.

Notebook theft is a growing problem. Although recent figures for the UK are unavailable, the 2004 CSI/FBI PC crime and security survey in the US found that notebook theft is the second most prevalent crime, after virus-related problems. With notebooks ranging in price from £400 right on up to £2,000 or more, it's easy to see why a notebook security cable costing from £19.95 upwards is must-have security purchase.

Ratings:

| | |
|-------------|-------|
| Features | **** |
| Ease of us | ***** |
| Performance | **** |

Documentation ****
Support *****
Value for money *****

Overall rating ****

The full report, prepared by Steve Gold, can be found at
www.avanquest.co.uk/downloads/stevegoldfeb2005.doc

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