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# Laptop Reliability Ratings: Which Laptop is Really Most Reliable?

by Matthew Smith on May 7, 2010



When I wrote the Smidgen PC [laptop brand guide](#) one of the issues which I touched upon was the overall reliability of the laptop brands as based on several sources of data. Today I want to take a closer look at overall laptop reliability in order to answer some common but typically unanswered questions.

The main source of the information for this article is the [Squaretrade reliability report](#). Squaretrade is a company which sells third party warranties. Their relationship to the laptop industry is like a car insurance company's relationship to the auto industry. Squaretrade has an interest in laptops becoming more reliable because it means they have to pay out less often. The report takes failure data from a sample of over 30,000 laptops which Squaretrade's customers have warranted. So, let's look at some of the findings.

## Laptops are Generally Unreliable

Overall, 20 percent of laptops fail after three years of use. When broken down into years, we can see that the first year – the only year most manufacturers cover – has an only 4.7 percent chance of seeing a malfunction. By the second year the chance of failure has climbed to 12.7 percent.

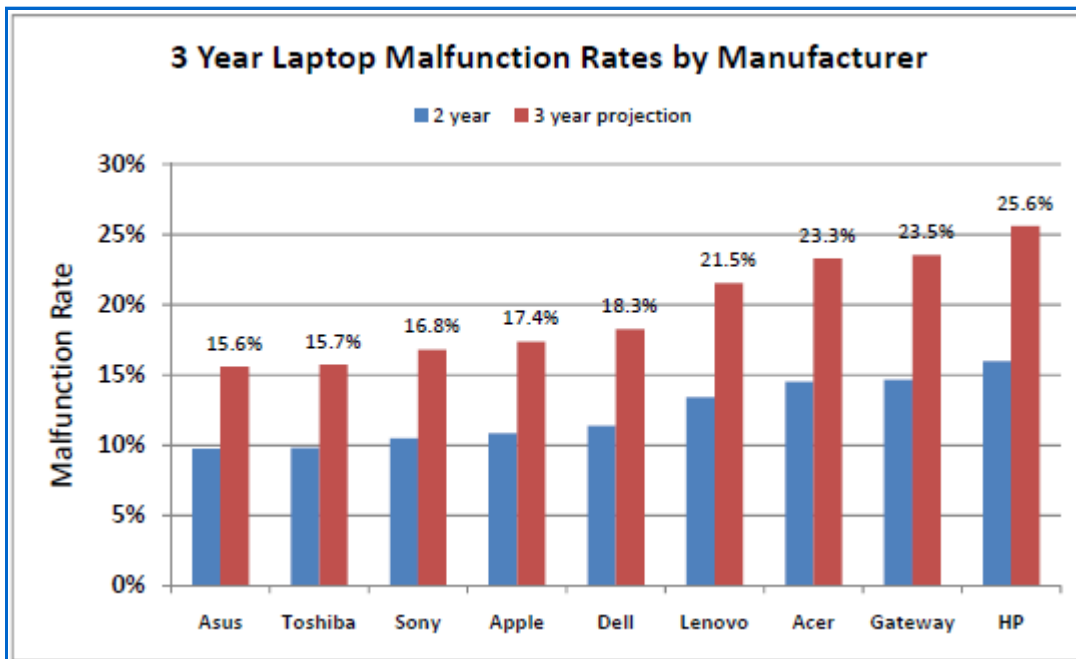
If accidents are taken into account, the chance of failure increases to 31% over a three year period. Squaretrade includes this figure not to comment on manufacturers, but rather to comment on the fact that laptops are placed into a naturally more difficult environment than most consumer electronics,

which sit in one place in the home and are unlikely to be knocked over or otherwise destroyed.

Still, the chance of laptop failure is much higher than with most consumer electronics. The chance of an HDTV failing, for example is generally [less than 10%](#) even after three years of use. There is essentially a 1 in 3 chance that any laptop you purchase will not still be working three years down the road.

### Brand Matters in Laptop Reliability

As was pointed out in the [laptop brand guide](#), brand really, really matters when considering laptop reliability. The laptop reliability rating of the different manufacturers is available on the graph below. This is for malfunctions only, not accidents as well.



There is a significant difference of laptop reliability ratings between the leader, ASUS, and the loser, HP. In fact, it is 40% more likely that you will encounter a failure within three years if you purchase a HP laptop than if you purchase an ASUS laptop. That's a really, really big gap, and one that many buyers apparently aren't aware of – HP sold 16 million laptops last year and is currently the world's largest PC vendor.

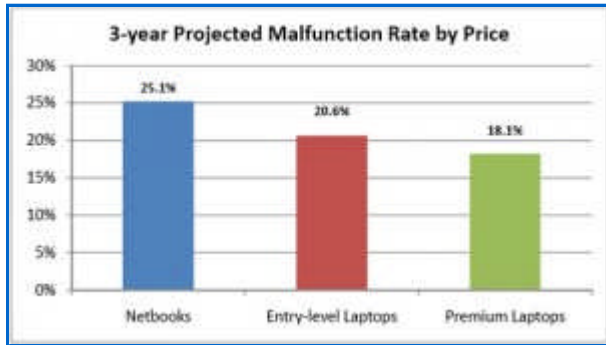
There also is a big gap between the more reliable and less reliable manufacturers. The jump from Dell to Lenovo is the largest gap in reliability on the graph. I'm sure many will be surprised by Lenovo's place on this graph considering Lenovo's reputation for durability. However, this data is for malfunctions only. Resistance to accidents is not a factor.

### Netbooks Less Reliable – Premium Laptops More Reliable

In addition to looking at laptop reliability ratings, the Squaretrade report also takes a limited look at netbook reliability ratings.

The findings were not favorable to netbooks, but are also very limited. According to the information collected in the first year, netbooks are approximately 20% more likely to fail than a laptop within the first year of use. However, Squaretrade's data is limited to one year, so in actuality this means that 5.8%

of netbooks failed within one year as compared to 4.7% of laptops. In a three year projection it is expected that 25.1% of netbooks will fail, but Squaretrade admits that this projection is so far very rough.



It also appears that premium laptops are less likely to fail. Premium laptops are defined as those over \$1000 in price. A premium laptop has a 18.1% chance of failure over three years, just slightly below that of less expensive laptops.

### Laptop Reliability Conclusions

The most important conclusion to take for this data is that laptop reliability ratings do differ substantially between brands. While an inexpensive laptop from HP or Acer may seem like a good deal, it is substantially more likely that you will experience a failure with that laptop compared to someone who buys a product from ASUS or Toshiba. Considering that all laptops are expensive, this is an important consideration.

The other observation which can be taken from the report is that laptops are generally unreliable, but probably still not so unreliable that you need to purchase a third party warranty, particularly if you purchase a laptop from a reliable manufacturer. The 15% chance that an ASUS laptop will fail within three years is not substantial. In fact, I wouldn't really worry unless I bought a laptop from a manufacturer with a three year chance of failure over 20%.

Finally, it can be speculated that netbooks will prove to be less reliable than normal laptops. Considering the price points which netbooks inhabit, this is not surprising. It is also reasonable to speculate that netbooks will be more vulnerable to accidents, as well, since they are meant to be portable but are not built to withstand lumps and bumps.

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