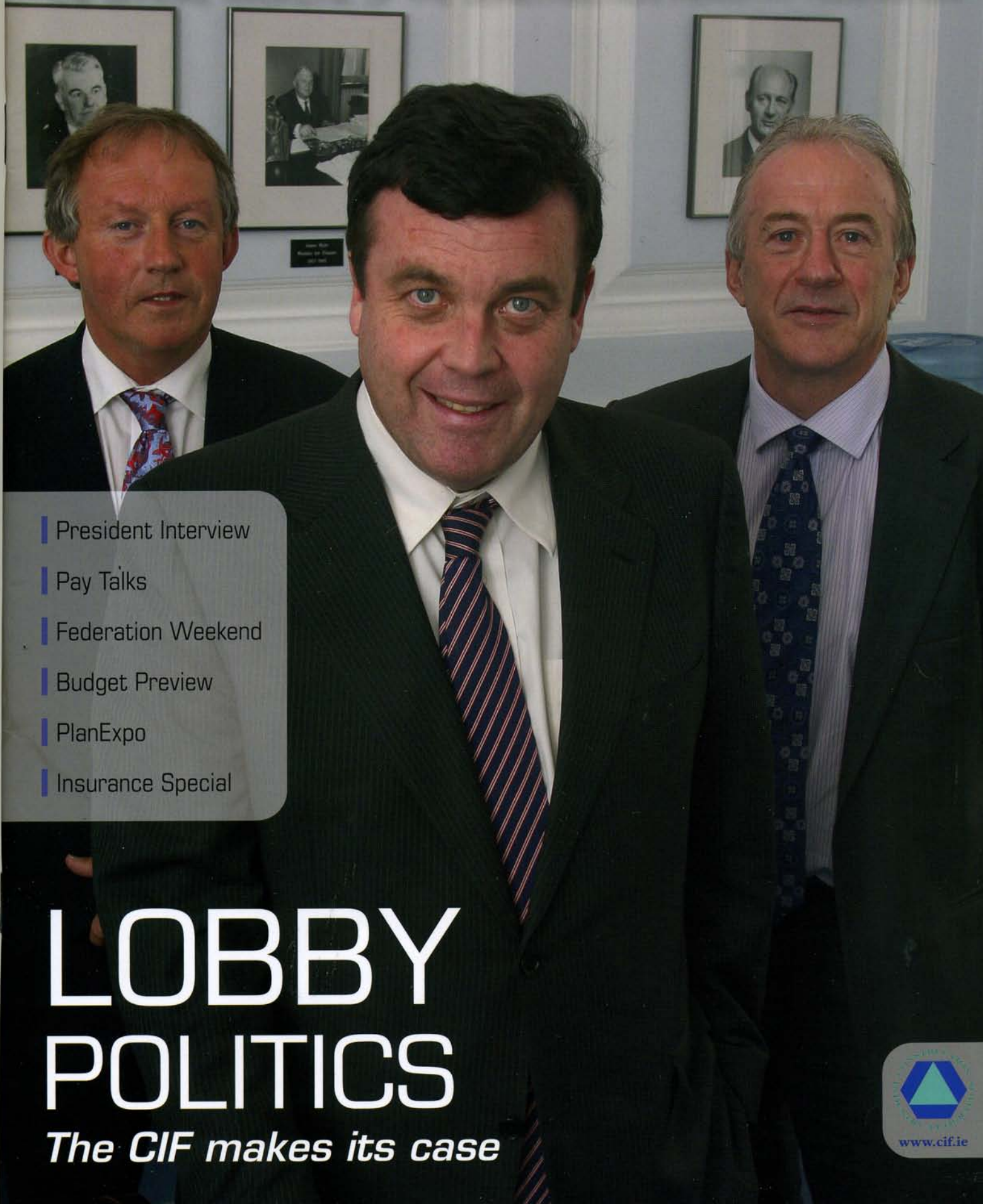


October 2008

CONSTRUCTION

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY FEDERATION



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GETAC B300 REVIEW

When is a laptop more than a laptop? When it is used by the military in the toughest conditions. **Andrew Eager** reviews the Getac B300

The first thing that will strike you about this latest offering from Getac is the plain and simple fact that it looks the part. Coming cased as it does in a generous helping of magnesium and rubber, this is one laptop that will comfortably take as much abuse as can be dished out to it. In fact, given that this is model also can be optimized for the battlefield, it's likely that there wouldn't be too much on any given building site that would trouble it unduly.

Promoted as the 'top end, of the top end' of ruggedized laptops, Getac claims that the B300 has more unique features than any other rival. Certainly, it appears to be a claim grounded in fact with features such as the 'blackout' button (which will kill all luminous activity on the laptop instantaneously), and a screen that includes the brightest sunlight readable display in the industry (while also being readable to those using night vision goggles), and a GPS module, as upgradeable options from the standard spec.

A particularly nice touch is the recessed socket design, complete with shutters so that not only are the delicate electronic ports (biometric fingerprint reader, USB sockets, battery socket etc.) kept out of harms way of collision damage, they are also protected from debris, dirt and liquid spills. The hard disk is also shock-mounted to protect the most important thing of all – the information contained within.

One feature we certainly did like was the very robust, and very secure feeling, integrated handle, which made carrying the B300 a reasonably agreeable affair (certainly it was a welcome improvement on the somewhat unwieldy Getac E100 tablet which we looked at previously)

With regard to the 'under the skin' technology, the B300 could hardly be said to be cutting edge. In fact, in comparison to the current available processors, and with supported RAM thresholds now routinely reaching 4GBs amongst its less ruggedized cousins, the B300 with its 1.6GHz Core 2 Duo CPU and 2GBs of RAM, working off a 120GB hard disk, is by no means stellar. However, having worked this B300 with Windows XP Pro installed, it is safe to say that it has far more computing muscle than is necessary to run XP and several applications at the same time. Those who may have a requirement for a machine with an effective graphic requirement will find themselves also catered for, with the B300 using an Intel 965 chipset which has provision for allocating 384 MBs of RAM for the integrated video card – surely more than enough to run a construction industry software staple such as Autocad.

The 13.3" XGA screen is adequate and certainly is an improvement on the aforementioned Getac E100's 8.4". Although the screen only has a maximum resolution of 1024 x 768, in real terms, this shouldn't be an issue as it is unlikely that users will have a requirement to go beyond this in everyday use – higher

resolutions are usually only required for those involved in graphic design and such like.

The only downside to the B300 is the price tag. While our model is currently retailing at just shy of €4000 ex VAT, other models available start at €3324 ex VAT. However, given the high-end spec. coupled with the ruggedized treatment, this is one laptop whose various features more than adequately justify its cost.



Arguably the clincher though is the remarkably long battery-life which the B300 enjoys. While Getac claim a 12 hour battery life, Mobile Mark 2007 is reported to have clocked the B300 battery at 6 hours 45 minutes, this is one laptop that isn't tied to its ac/dc adapter! In fact, the B300 firmly put its nearest rival in this regard, firmly in its place (a Panasonic Toughbook which Mobile Mark 2007 fixed at an on-battery life span of 5 hours 15 minutes).

Something Getac did miss out on, is the provision of a webcam. Given that the B300 is one of the most network-friendly ruggedized laptops out there (if not the most – Gigabit LAN, Wireless 802.11g, Bluetooth) we would have thought it made sense to include a webcam which surely could not have added more to the weight or cost, given the initial pricing of the B300. We expect that this is something Getac will address in subsequent models, given that video conferencing is becoming more mainstream, and the B300's nearest rivals are already providing this facility on some of their models.

As ruggedized laptops go, our few quibbles aside, this chap pretty much sets the benchmark for where the sector is likely to go over the next year. Getac's use of US Military criteria to set the 'ruggedized' agenda is an inspired technology and marketing decision. Complete with a 3 year return-to-base warranty, the B300 has put it up to its rivals in the sector. Given the pedigree of all those involved, it's likely the year ahead is going to be a bruising contest.

More information is available at www.rugged-systems.co.uk

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