

REALITY CHECK

Laptop Cooling Pad

Can this basic accessory keep you from getting burned?

by Todd Haselton



THE PROMISE

Some laptops get so hot they've been known to cause minor burns when exposed to skin. High temperatures can also shorten the life of your notebook's components; a hard drive running hotter than its recommended limit (131 to 149 degrees Fahrenheit for most systems) can ruin its reliability—not to mention scald its user. Is a laptop cooling pad the answer? These accessories are available from a variety of companies, and many claim to keep your legs comfortable and your notebook's insides operating at safe temperatures. We've mostly ignored them. Until now.

THE GEAR

We tested the Laptop Cooling Lounge from Belkin (\$39.99; www.belkin.com) to see if its USB-powered fan could keep our Gateway P-171FX cool during extended gaming sessions. The system had an average external operating temperature of 82.7 degrees Fahrenheit while running idle, but we've found that the bottom of the notebook can exceed 100 degrees. The Laptop Cooling Lounge also features an adjustable underside for tilting your laptop. The unit was a bit unstable with a 17-inch notebook resting on it; we wish it had some sort of strap to prevent a laptop from sliding off. On a desk, however, the adjustable underside was handy for tilting the laptop closer to eye level.



THE RESULTS

We were surprised that the cooling pad's small fan was able to drop the system's external temperature in the center of the underside to 88 degrees Fahrenheit, just 4 degrees hotter than when our system was idle and 11 degrees cooler than when we gamed without the cooling pad. Unfortunately, since heat rises, our keyboard's temperature remained a steamy 97 degrees.

	IDLE	HIGH-LOAD	HIGH-LOAD WITH BELKIN LAPTOP COOLING LOUNGE
BACK LEFT CORNER	78°	85°	86°
BACK RIGHT CORNER	81°	84°	85°
FRONT LEFT CORNER	81°	90°	86°
FRONT RIGHT CORNER	77°	94°	91°
CENTER OF BOTTOM	84°	99°	88°
G AND H KEYS	82°	97°	97°
UNDER LCD	95°	101°	97°
BATTERY	84°	81°	83°

*Temperatures in Fahrenheit

THE TEST

While the notebook was idle and sitting on our desk, we used a temperature gun to take readings of the underside of the notebook in each of the four bottom corners, on the battery pack, below the LCD display, and between the G and H keys on the keyboard. We then played through a few levels of *Call of Duty 4*, and took the readings again. Then, with the notebook docked on the active Belkin Laptop Cooling Lounge, we played the game again, and took the system's temperature once more.

THE VERDICT

We can't say that every laptop cooling pad is worth it, but the Belkin Laptop Cooling Lounge did pretty well keeping our notebook cool, lowering the average high-workload temperature by 3 degrees on the underside of our machine and 2 degrees overall. We'd recommend it for those who do a fair amount of computing in their lap, whether they're sitting on the sofa or in bed. It's just not very portable.