

Amkette WF301 Wireless Keyboard

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Amkette has a fairly unique input device in their WF301. Marketed as the Integrated Wireless Keyboard With Trackball, the product's name leaves nothing to the imagination. It does pretty much what it says, and also manages to look subtle and pretty. This glossy black keyboard could even be called stylish, just be mindful of leaving finger-prints over the glossy surface. This is an integrated input device with the functionality of a keyboard and mouse rolled into one. Notable is the fact that such "integrated" input devices are rare.

It is the first of its kind launched in India, and a price comparison with other brands offering competing products leaves the Amkette device clearly on top in price. Refreshingly, this keyboard does not pretend to be targeted at gamers or power users. Clearly the intention has been to reduce the space occupied by input devices and consolidate it all in one place. This philosophy is going to do very well in general home usage scenarios and office/cyber-café environments.

You can think of this input device as being inspired by the smaller-yet-full-featured keyboards seen on mainstream laptops. The "Function" key's presence and a "Num Lock" key that uses normal keys from the QWERTY side as the "Number Pad" are both evidence of this. Also, the numeric keypad has been dispensed with and not all keys are full-sized, clearly to make room for the trackball, mouse buttons and scroller. The keys that are used less frequently, such as the Ctrl/Alt/Windows/Context/Delete/Spacebar keys

have been reduced in size, but the alphabet keys are full-sized. As a bonus, there are 10 extra multimedia hotkeys, a power button; and left/right mouse buttons at the left-side as well in addition to the mouse buttons placed below the trackball.

Once paired over wireless, the keyboard works just fine even at the BIOS stage and operates like a normal USB-connected keyboard on all operating systems (Windows detects the wireless adapter as a USB composite device). The keys provide reasonable feedback and are comfortable to type away at (this review is actually being typed using it). The built-in trackball that controls the mouse cursor is said to be optical with a resolution of 800dpi. As is to be expected, a first-time user would need to traverse a little learning curve to operate the PC with a trackball, but he/she will quickly get comfortable with it. Pairing the Wireless Adapter and integrated keyboard took some extra attempts at first, but once that was done, it worked fine at a range of 8.5 metres away from the RF adapter. We found that for the best results, being in reasonable "line of sight" of the adapter was required.

It would have been nice if the keyboard provided the facility of a raised base (as seen on most keyboards just below the F1 to F12 keys). As is usual with wireless devices, batteries would usually last 6 months. To prevent being stranded with no keyboard or mouse functionality (since they are all on the same device), we suggest keeping a set of alternative batteries ready for the day when the batteries eventually run out. Lastly, this wireless device makes use of the free-for-all 2.4 GHz radio frequency, so be prepared for some signal interference once in a while whenever you use other consumer devices that operate over the same spectrum (oven, wireless headsets, wireless game controllers, bluetooth, WiFi, and so on). But signal interference isn't much of a negative if you understand what you are getting into. In any case, this device is not targeted at those who have a dozen other wireless devices lying around, since those people may prefer getting a separate keyboard and mouse anyway.

Bottom Line

A good input device that combines keyboard and mouse functionality into one compact and wireless product. Useful in office and commercial settings to save on desk space. However, this audience is traditionally familiar with low prices, and this product just might be priced out of the intended audience at its current pricing of over Rs. 2,000 and that takes a toll on its rating.

Specification

Connectivity

USB dongle, 2.4 GHz Wireless operation

Range Claimed

10 metres from receiver

Other Notables

10 multimedia hot keys, Compact size

Trackball

800dpi Optical, includes scroll wheel, left/right click buttons
