

Gadgets, games, hard'n'soft

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iStorage diskAshur Pro

Posted by: [Максим Митькин](#)



If security of data is something you're concerned about, especially with regard to data being stored on a portable external drive, then you're not going to find anything quite as impressive as the solutions from iStorage.

In particular, the diskAshur Pro looks like it may well be used by the likes of MI5. Here we have a portable hard drive measuring 19 x 84.5 x 120mm and weighing just 190g. A built-in USB 3.0 cable extends to a reasonable 120mm from the unit, and the toughened, rubberised finish adds an element of water-proofing and ruggedness. It's available in a range of capacities, from 500GB to 1TB, 1.5TB and 2TB, with the 1TB version being reviewed here.

The dominating feature and main security selling point is the large numeric keypad on the front of the device. With this you can set an admin and five unique user PIN codes up to 16-digits in length. This, in combination with the 256-bit AES-XTS military, hardware-level encryption, means that whatever you store on there will be secure from prying eyes unless they know the PIN.

In addition to this, there are also some very nifty features that sound like they come straight from Q-branch. You can set a unique Self Destruct PIN which, when entered, will instantly destroy all PINs and the contained data, and then it creates a new encryption key. It's protected against brute force attacks to gain access to the PIN, and it's OS free and works on any system including thin clients. And thanks to the general overall ruggedness, it can even withstand a shock or impact up to 1000G when not in operation and 300G when in operation.

Transfers speeds are pretty dire, however. The 1GB file was written at a speed of 60MB per second and read at 90MB per second. It's not lightning fast, that much is clear.

In the box you get the device itself, along with a padded nylon carry case, a quick start guide and a USB extension cable. The instructions, as mentioned, are easy enough to get to grips with, and after a short while you'll get used to the 'plug in, enter PIN, access drive, lock, unplug' way of doing things.

The only concern we had was the lifespan of the keypad. It's certainly robust enough and well engineered, but what if the numbers rub off? Or what if it develops a fault and one of the buttons fails to be detected when pressed? Thankfully, the two-year warranty iStorage supplies when registering diskAshur will take care of that, so you're in good hands at least.

While it's easy to preach the values of security, the diskAshur Pro may well be overkill for the average home user. If all you're doing is storing a few downloads, then there's little point in spending the small fortune that iStorage wants for the diskAshur. However, if you work in an environment where security of data is paramount, then £209 (for the 500GB version, rising to £329 for the 2TB model) may sound like a small price to pay.