



LEXMARK E250dn

Color lasers may be the wave of the future, but monochrome lasers aren't going to disappear anytime soon, especially not with models such as the Lexmark E250dn (\$249 direct) available. The E250dn is not only the right size and price for a small office, or even a home office with heavy printing needs; it also offers all the features a typical small office could hope for, including a network connector, a built-in duplexer to make it easy to print on both sides of the page, and an eye-catching 30-pages-per-minute (ppm) engine rating.

The E250dn is part of a new line of monochrome lasers that most notably includes the E250d (\$199 direct), which Lexmark says is identical to the E250dn but without the network connector. The other three models in the line—the E350d (\$349), E352dn (\$449), and E450dn (\$599)—are similar in most ways but are built around an even faster engine, rated at 35 ppm. Lexmark likes to emphasize the "green" in these printers, with features that include duplexing on every model (to help save paper) and an instant warm-up fuser that both saves power and speeds up the time it takes to print the first page from a cold start.

Although the E250dn is far from the smallest monochrome laser printer I've seen—that honor still belongs to the much less-expensive and slower HP LaserJet 1018—it's small and light enough, at 10.2 by 15.6 by 14.1 inches (HWD) and 25 pounds, so you shouldn't have any trouble making room for it. Setup is standard for the breed, consisting of little more than removing the packing materials, loading paper, plugging in the cable and power cord, and running the automated installation routine.

Speed is one of the best arguments for buying the E250dn. The printer's total time on our business applications suite (timed with QualityLogic's hardware and software, www.qualitylogic.com) was just 6 minutes 19 seconds—a smidge slower than the 6:00 for the fastest printer I've yet seen in this price range, Brother HL-5250dn. It's significantly faster than the 7:11 total of the next fastest, the Dell Laser Printer 1710n.

The E250dn's output quality is pretty much what I'd expect to see from a monochrome laser, although the text is a touch less than ideal. The best monochrome lasers print more than half our test fonts well enough to qualify as easily readable at 4 points, with none needing more than 12 points. With the E250dn, more than half of our test fonts were easily readable at 5 points, some were easily readable at 4 points, and one highly stylized font with thick strokes needed more than 12 points. Unless you have a strong need for small fonts, however, the



E250dn can handle any text you need to print.

Graphics quality was absolutely par for the course. I'd use it for any internal business purpose without a second thought, but I wouldn't hand its output to important clients or customers if I were trying to impress them with my professionalism. The biggest problem was a tendency for thin lines to disappear. I also saw some banding and some uneven pile height—with toner piled high in some spots but not others, so light reflected better from those spots and showed a pattern in what should be an even fill.

For printing photos, the E250dn isn't quite a match for most monochrome lasers, but that's not bad enough to be a problem. The photos are certainly good enough for things such as client newsletters and printing Web pages, which are the most common reasons for printing photos on a monochrome laser.

The E250dn's paper handling complements its high speed. The standard paper tray holds a reasonably ample 250 sheets, with a manual feed slot also available, and, of course, the internal duplexer standard. For more heavy-duty needs, a 550-sheet tray (\$199 direct) boosts the capacity to 800 sheets. Lexmark says that a 250-sheet (\$99) tray will be available in the first quarter of 2007 as well. All told, the total package offers a well-thought-out balance of speed, quality, and paper handling that makes the Lexmark E250dn easy to recommend.

—M. David Stone

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Bottomline: The Lexmark E250dn delivers speed and reasonably high-quality monochrome output for a small office, along with a network connection and duplexing.

Pros: Fast. Network connector. Built-in duplexer. Reasonably high-quality text and graphics.

Cons: Photo quality is a little lower than what most monochrome lasers offer.

