WINNER
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AWARD

Lexar JumpDrive S45

AN IMPRESSIVE COMBINATION OF SIZE, SPEED AND PRICE.

LEXAR'S TINY S45 is one of the best 'plug and stay' in terms of design, being mostly plug, with only a very short nub of a body that ever-so-slightly flares out on the sides to make it easier to remove. Plugged into a MacBook Air, that body sits almost flush against the side of the laptop.

This is a USB 3.0 device that actually offers quite competitive speeds — the 128GB model we tested delivered 125MB/s reads and writes up to 100MB/s, although, as with many other USB flash drives, the latter can be a bit erratic; in our benchmarks, they generally fluctuated between 70–100MB/s. Admittedly, that range is still very good compared to most of the other USB devices here and, overall, the S45 was only beaten by the Ultra Fit in speed.

Lexar has included the third-party EncryptStick Lite program (for Mac and Windows) that lets you create password-protecting and encrypted folders, but that's it in terms of software. About the only downside to the S45 is that it's a little less discrete than others, due to the one big LED light that flashes brightly when there's drive activity.

Kingston DataTraveler Micro 3.1

LONG BUT SKINNY — AND VERY TOUGH.

THIS ALL-METAL DRIVE is basically a USB plug with a hole chiselled in the end (ostensibly to let you put it on a keyring), and while it's perhaps not the shortest around — it's nearly 25mm long, compared to about 18mm for the best-in-class models here — it's at least quite sleek: there are no real curved edges or hooked corners for things to catch on. It's pretty spartan in other areas, too. There's no software included, nor is there even a protective cap to cover the plug itself. Its metal construction does make it feel very sturdy, but this will mean dust is likely to build up in the USB plug if you have it rattling around in your pocket.

Read speeds were quite competitive at around 118MB/s average, but there was a lot of fluctuation when it came to writes. The latter saw spikes of up to 70MB/s, but lows of 17MB/s. To its credit, Kingston only makes claims of write speeds of 15MB/s on this little drive, so at least the company's not gilding the lily...

In short, it technically does the job, but quicker write speeds would have seen this one score higher.

Transcend JetFlash 890S

A FLEXIBLE OPTION FOR TRANSPORTING DATA BETWEEN OLD AND NEW DEVICES.

AT 28.6MM, TRANSCEND'S JetFlash 890S was the longest USB drive we tested for this feature and, therefore, also the one that'll stick out the side of a laptop the most. Its main body is slightly bulbous, but that's because Transcend doesn't technically spruik this one for 'plug-and-stay' duties — underneath that black plastic cap, there's actually a USB Type-C plug, and it's that plug that ultimately requires this drive to have so much length.

These back-to-back dual plugs will let the 890S plug into laptops both old and new, although it's only really suitable to be left in place on that older USB-A side.

With 122.5MB/s reads and 40.7MB/s writes — and very consistent performance for the latter — it's passable for speed. Transcend only claims reads and writes of 90MB/s and 30MB/s, so they're actually underselling this one's capabilities somewhat. No software is included on the drive — it's a clean FAT32-formatted job that's ready for filling up — and although the range tops out at 64GB, prices are reasonably fair; if perhaps a tad higher than we'd like.

4½

LEXAR JUMPDRIVE S45
From $15 (16GB) to $80 (128GB)
www.lexar.com

CRITICAL SPECS
USB 3.0; available in 16GB, 32GB, 64GB and 128GB; 18 x 16 x 8mm; 3-year warranty

3½

KINGSTON DATATRAVELER MICRO 3.1
From $20 (16GB) to $65 (128GB)
www.kingston.com

CRITICAL SPECS
USB 3.0; available in 16GB, 32GB, 64GB and 128GB; 25 x 12 x 4.5mm; 5-year warranty

3½

TRANSCEND JETFLASH 890S
From $22 (16GB) to $45 (64GB)
au.transcend-info.com

CRITICAL SPECS
USB 3.1; available in 16GB, 32GB, 64GB; 29 x 14 x 8.6mm