(Approx. 531 words)

Microsoft Windows in "S Mode"

News and/or Opinion from the SHCC Editor

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Someone recently asked me for my opinion on a sale-priced laptop at a local store and whether I'd recommend its purchase.

An HP laptop with an Intel i5 CPU with a Passmark rating of 691, 8GB of RAM, 256GB SSD, 17" screen, Windows 11, backlit keyboard, and full HD display. All in all, a decently powered mobile PC on sale for only $399, advertised as "$300 off their regular price."

What could be wrong with this selection?

Windows 11, that's what could be 'wrong' with this selection. However, looking closely at the specifications of this offering indicated that the version of Windows 11 that came installed on this laptop was "Windows 11 Home in S Mode."

I had never heard of "S Mode," so this would be a new education for me. "S Mode" (Windows 10 or 11) basically limits you to accepting applications only from Microsoft. However, they say that "S mode is designed for security and performance, exclusively running apps from the Microsoft Store. So if you want to install an app that isn't available in the Microsoft Store, you'll need to switch out of S mode".

But this laptop isn't such a bad purchase after all (if you are on a budget and accept the small drive size and the middle-of-the-road Passmark CPU score) because you can

"leave" Windows S Mode at any time. This will result in your new PC having the full Windows Home edition. The only caveat is that you cannot reverse this decision. But I

suspect that for most PC users, this would be the right permanent direction to go anyway.

See below links to review articles about Windows S Mode (for Windows 10 and 11) — what it is and how to leave it.

When shopping for a new PC, always study the specifications sheet for each of your purchase candidates so that you don't encounter unexpected surprises after your eventual choice. But be aware that the specifications list for a PC on any particular store's website may not be complete, and some of the spec info listed there may also be inaccurate (which happens too often!), so double-check the information about your potential purchase, perhaps on the PC manufacturer's web site.

Also, purchase from a retailer that offers a return policy without any restocking fee. In my opinion, if you can't test-drive your selection in the store, you should be able to do so at home and return it at no charge if it doesn't meet your expectations. (Be sure to delete all your files and footprints before returning the device! Maybe even re-install the Operating System on it to accomplish that entirely.) Most retailers offer a free 14-day return policy. Costco offers a very generous 90-day return policy (as well as great sale prices on equipment).

Switching out of Windows “S Mode” results in a full Windows Home edition and cannot be reversed.

<https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/windows/switching-out-of-s-mode-in-windows-4f56d9be-99ec-6983-119f031bfb28a307#WindowsVersion=Windows_11>

Some low-cost Windows PCs and tablets ship with Windows 11 Home in S Mode. Here is the process for switching out of S Mode.

<https://www.pcworld.com/article/545076/how-to-switch-out-of-windows-11-in-s-mode.html>