

ARE WE ABOUT TO ENTER THE GOLDEN AGE OF GAMES ON-THE-GO?

By Will Guyatt

Tech Journalist and Broadcaster

I cannot wait to get my hands on one of the new Asus Rog Xbox handheld consoles - it feels like 1990 all over again. Back at the dawn of the first handheld era, four companies came to the market with a differing array of hardware around the same time.

Nintendo's original Game Boy with its black-and-white dot matrix display proved you must never judge a book by its cover. Leaving more technically advanced devices from Sega, NEC and even Atari in its wake, under a massive pile of used AA batteries.



Thirty-five years on and Nintendo continues in the lead, ploughing its own furrow with the Switch 2 - now officially the company's fastest-selling hardware of all-time. Despite the apparent success of Valve's Steam Deck handheld, it's eye-opening to realise that Switch 2 effectively outsold the three-and-a-half year old console in under a week.

To me - this shows there's plenty of room in the market for more portable devices, before we even consider the staggering range of legally-dubious "retro" emulation handhelds available online.

Some may question Microsoft's licensing of the Xbox brand to Asus in the first instance - but that betrays the company's efforts to get its games ecosystem running in all kinds of places, including my mother-in-law's smart TV. Judged purely on what we've already seen to the Asus Rog Xbox - the first devices will do much to improve handheld PC gaming.

Currently - the first generation of handheld gaming PCs from companies like Asus and MSI are pretty decent hardware, hampered by the fact that the full Windows 11 experience truly sucks on a tiny screen.

These devices are bloated with 'add-ons' that attempt to make the gaming experience as simple as using a Steam Deck, while forgetting that simplicity is Valve's greatest strength.

By developing a vastly-shrunk version of Windows tweaked by the Xbox team could revolutionise the handheld PC gaming space. For me - anything that stops devices from getting literally too hot to hand will be a huge step forward.

If done properly, these new Xbox handhelds will benefit from considerable games libraries too - not just Game Pass and Xbox Play Anywhere titles. With Steam and other storefronts, there could be thousands of compatible titles on day-one, which feels like another win.

As someone that spends a significant amount of their life on trains and planes, this is a day one purchase for me. Let's hope those new Sony handheld rumours are true too - what a great time to play games on the go.



Will Guyatt is a Tech Journalist and Broadcaster for LBC, BBC Radio 2 and many more.

He is former Head of Comms for Instagram, IGN and Future Publishing.