Qualcomm sets sights on Apple M2 laptops with Snapdragon X Elite

By Lindsey Schutters

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Qualcomm, the world's major mobile chipmaker, has unveiled its latest computing platform, the Snapdragon X Elite. The platform is designed to revolutionise the Windows PC industry with its high-performance capabilities and efficient power usage.

The Snapdragon X Elite is built on a 4nm process, allowing for a greater number of transistors and therefore a faster performance. It features the custom-integrated Qualcomm Oryon CPU, which promises to deliver up to 2x faster CPU performance than the competition at one-third the power.

That Oryon platform has its roots in the chip design company Nuvia that Qualcomm acquired in 2021. Nuvia was founded by three high-ranking engineers from Apple's chip division, with the original goal of designing ARM server chips (though it never launched a product).

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Qualcomm boasted of the platform's impressive AI capabilities, particularly the ability to run generative AI models with over 13 billion parameters on-device. Qualcomm claims that the mobile platform has 4.5x faster AI processing than its competitors, which weren't named in the Snapdragon Summit presentation.

The company did detail how Snapdragon X Elite is set to challenge Apple's M2 laptops in several ways. Primarily, the new chip is built on a 4nm process, while the Apple M2 is based on a 5nm process. This could potentially give the Snapdragon X Elite a performance edge.

Microsoft has a poor ARM track record

Snapdragon X Elite features 12 high-performance cores, compared to the 8 cores in the Apple M2, which could result in better multi-threaded performance. Qualcomm claims a 50% faster peak multi-threaded performance than M2.

Despite these impressive specifications, real-world performance can vary and will depend on a range of factors including software optimisation, which Microsoft has a history of not getting right for ARM-based Windows computers. The first devices featuring Snapdragon X Elite chips are expected to arrive in mid-2024.

As the tech world eagerly awaits these new chips, it will be interesting to see how they perform in comparison to Apple's M-series processors. With its promise of high performance and efficient power usage, the Snapdragon X Elite could potentially reshape the PC industry.

Apple has also announced a 30 October hardware announcement where the M3 processors are rumoured to be announced in refreshed MacBooks, which could potentially extend the company's lead in next-gen mobile computing.

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