Palm Treo 650 Review

By Brandon King Published August 23, 2019

Palm Treo 650

MSRP **$49.99**

Score Details



"The Palm Treo 650 is a great all-around replacement for that old PDA and cell phone rattling around in your pocket."

Pros	Cons
Tight integration of PalmOS with phone features; optional camera; Bluetooth	Buggy software; no Wi-Fi; limited memory

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Summary

If you're tired of lugging around your cell phone, PDA, and digital camera every time you leave home, the Treo 650 is worth a gander. While the operating system is aged, the phone is prone to crashing, and you will need to buy an additional SD memory card to get a respectable amount of storage, the undeniable convenience of this hybrid phone should not scare you away.

Background

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The history of PalmOS's cell phones is actually a relatively long one. Early models from companies like Kyocera and Samsung were bulky and slow. A PalmOS licensee called Handspring started the Treo line in 2001, and it was an instant success. Even though they weren't the best-looking Smartphones, the price and convenience of the simple Palm interface earned it praise from many critics. Palm took note of the company's success and in 2003, placing the Palm badge on the Handspring 600.

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The Palm Treo 600 instantly became the standard against which all Smartphones were compared. As with many things Palm, the Treo line remained unchanged for too long. Microsoft, taking advantage of the ability to integrate PDA/cell phone functionality into the Windows OS, entered the market with some of the lowest-selling hybrid phones ever. But, as with PDAs, Mobile Windows was quickly

upgraded and refined. Just when the outcry for an upgraded Treo 600 reached a fevered pitch, with many long-time Palm devotees threatening to jump ship for the dark side, Palm released the Treo 650.

Out of the Box Experience

The package content for the Palm Treo 650 is relatively sparse. You get the phone, sync cable, AC charging cable, wired headset, and software CD. The one glaring omission that we've noted with all recent Palm products is a docking/syncing station. We also would have liked to see a car charger and Bluetooth headset, as the package contents have remained unchanged for over a year. The experience out of the box is average, and Palm would be wise to try and make the Treo feel like the high quality product it is. Packaging similar to the way Apple packages the iPod might go a long way to improving Palm's image.

Design

The Treo 650 sports an undeniably sleek design, improving greatly on earlier, clunky versions. The glossy silver finish and smooth curves along with the substantial weight exude the feeling of a quality product. The 160×160 touch screen is clear, bright, and responsive. The screen surface contains most of the interface buttons. The Palm-associated buttons are intermixed with the cell phone-specific buttons in a very natural pattern. The layout itself appears more like a PDA button pattern, with just the addition of the Send and End added to the sides of the top row.

The interface buttons include a four-way directional pad, surrounded by the Palm Home, Calendar, Menu, and Mail buttons. The Send and End buttons are located the furthest toward the edge of what could be called the interface buttons. A full QWERTY keyboard consumes the bottom fourth of the phone. The keyboard is application aware and automatically switches the third, forth, and fifth columns to numeric mode when the phone application is used. The keyboard is fully backlit across the entire button, while the interface buttons have a silver finish with

backlighting for their symbols. All of the buttons have a satisfying click to them, and one-handed navigation with Palm OS 5.4 is a breeze.

Along the left edge is the Volume Up and Down buttons as well as the Side/Back button. The bottom edge includes the dock, power, and headset connectors, while the right edge is bare. Along the top edge are the IRDA port, Sound On/Off switch, SD card slot, and SIM card slot. The back surface contains the speaker, camera lens with self-portrait mirror, and stylus holder. In order to reset the Treo, the back cover must be removed to expose the battery and button.

Connectivity

There are both GSM and CDMA versions of the Treo 650, with matching features. The CDMA version lacks an EV-DO modem, so no high-speed internet access for those stuck with Verizon or Sprint. The Cingular GSM version has a leg up on CDMA carriers by including EDGE network access. Aside from that, there is a slightly different color scheme that ranges from light silver to dark silver, depending on your model.

We tested the GSM version of the Treo 650. Like the CDMA version, Bluetooth is standard. But unlike the CDMA version, the GSM version has an intact OBEX profile. Verizon has long been stubborn at allowing this profile, for reasons we have not been able to find an answer. This is particularly troubling, since several automobile Bluetooth implementations, such as Toyota's, require OBEX for phone book uploading. Aside from Bluetooth, there is an IRDA port, but no Wi-Fi. Many of the shipping Windows Mobile phones have the ability, and there is even an 802.11g solution that was recently announced. This opens up using the phone for VOIP service like Skype, rather than using up precious anytime minutes.

Image Courtesy of Palm

Software

As with all Palm devices, nearly every piece of software you need is included right out of the box. The standard Contacts application has been updated to include the ability to call directly from a record. The Calendar, Tasks, Memos, Calc, and World Clock largely remain unchanged. Additional applications include RealPlayer for PalmOS, Camera, Media, Messaging, Phone, SIM Services, VersaMail, and Blazer web browser. PalmOS 5 has been out for far too long, and the issues with stability and memory are the result of a system that has been bandaged one too many times. Thirty-two MB of installed RAM is downright dismal for a modern PDA, and the lack of any bundles expansion card left us feeling sour.

VersaMail and Calender

The RealPlayer for PalmOS application supports .RM and .RMJ file types, as well as the tried-and-true MP3 format. Changing volume using the hardware buttons for volume independently adjusts the application volume from the system volume. Play list creation is relatively simple, and syncing via RealPlayer is as quick and painless as dealing with any Real application can be. Playback of media files is restricted to



The Camera application is simple and straightforward. There is a 2x digital zoom that is toggled with the directional pad. Both stills and movies can be taken and organized into customized albums. Each album then can be viewed in the media application for further organizing, filtering with a number of criteria, and creating slide shows. The Media application also can be used to draw pictures. The camera can take pictures at either VGA (640×480) or HVGA (320×240), and image quality is exceptional for an all-in-one device. Video can be taken at 320×240 or 176×144, both with audio. Also, the number of pictures that can fit into memory is displayed in the bottom right corner.

The Messaging is about as simple as it could be, and requires little explanation. It supports SMS and MMS and can string multiple SMS messages into a "chat." Also, templates can be set up for messaging. The Phone application is slick. A pop-up application launcher sits along the bottom, which can be customized to display four easily accessible programs, or expanded to show a larger list. Contacts can be added from within the application, and the preferences allow the phone to begin a Contact search with each button press.

If you opt for a data plan, the VersaMail and Blazer Web browser will allow you to perform basic email and web browsing. There are a number of more advanced third party options that do a better job, although there is no Opera browser available for the Palm platform. Other network applications include chat and VNC clients as well as a wealth of Palm applications.

As a final note, we were able to use the Treo 650 with Bluetooth on and all power-saving features disabled, except sleep, for a full 12-hour day. There was close to a quarter of a bar left after moderate phone use and slightly more than moderate PDA use. This is comparable to other Smartphone options (compared to the SonyEricsson P910a we reviewed earlier). We had a total of three lockups that required soft resets over the course of a day, all occurring during application switching with the phone active.

Conclusion

The Palm Treo 650 is a great all-around replacement for that old PDA and cell phone rattling around in your pocket. Sure, the software is a little buggy and the OS has more band-aids than a burn victim, but the stylish package and all-around convenience far outweigh these minor annoyances. Just be prepared to drop an extra $175-$250 for the essential add-ons, like a desktop cradle, DC charging cord, SD memory card, and Bluetooth headset.

Pros:

Tight integration of PalmOS with phone features

Optional camera; Bluetooth

Cons:

Buggy software

No Wi-Fi

Limited memory

Brandon King

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