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Palm Treo 650 GSM/GPRS Review

Posted on 22-Dec-2005 22:23 by *Leeann McCallum*. | Filed under: [Reviews](#) : [Palm](#).

I had been looking forward to getting my hands on a Palm Treo 650 for a long time, and when one was offered, I leapt at the opportunity to indulge.

The Palm Treo 650 smartphone is the younger sibling to the Palm Treo 600, and comes in two flavours: the GSM model which is quad band supporting GPRS data services, and the CDMA version supporting digital dual band (800/1900 Mhz) with 1xRTT for data. It is both a mobile phone and a fully featured PDA running Palm OS 5.4.5.

What's on the outer?

First up, of course I needed to put my SIM card in, and I found it immediately without having to remove the battery. Tremendously user friendly! While I was there, I also spotted the MMC/SD/SDIO expansion slot – (you'll need this, so don't forget where it is), the infrared port and the ringer switch between sound and vibrate. Simple things impress and this certainly did.

Its check-in weight was 178gms and packed in its bags was a CD full of third-party software for the Mac and PC, USB hot sync cable, power, earpiece and most impressively several international plugs. While it felt solid and ergonomic in my hand, I was less comfortable with it in my jeans pocket due to its body mass index. It's dressed lightly but smartly in a dark gray all-in-one with chrome trimmings, however it really needs a jacket for protection and I was disappointed not to find one tucked away. A quick shop for accessories, and I found a functional jacket for the 650 was available. Highly recommend the purchase to ensure your 650 is kept in good shape and the screen protected.

The screen size was very generous with resolution now a 16-bit, 320x320 TFT backlit display, a vast improvement over the 600's 160x160 LCD.



The 5-way navigation pad was easy to use and responsive to touch. The green and red call and hang up buttons were blindly locatable. The home and menu keys were directly above the dedicated Calendar and E-Mail buttons and everything was where it should be.

The Palm Treo 650 has a lovely QWERTY thumb keyboard which lights up like a Christmas tree when a key is pressed. All the alternate keys are easily accessible through the ALT key, two SHIFT keys and a blue FN key. My initial impression was there is no way I can thumb those keys and string words together that make sense. I was pleasantly surprised at how deft I became and in a very short time too, although my thumbs ached after a while in what felt like a fairly unnatural thumb position. The Palm Treo 650 keyboard is slightly more ergonomic than the Palm Treo 600 but I'd like to see more improvements in the key placement particularly to accommodate users with big thumbs.

Although I started off using the stylus quite a lot, as I grew more comfortable with the Treo, it just seemed natural to fat-finger away on the keyboard and screen. and the inside view...

I was quietly agog that after installing applications, and then synchronizing some files from the Documents to Go application, I literally had no room to move. My pixels and RAM were sagging. Go dig out your expansion cards and pop them into that slot we mentioned earlier as the 650 only has 23MB of available storage. Thankfully it is flash ROM, not RAM so you don't lose data if the device is powerless.

The Blazer web browser was speedy and pages loaded fast even on a GPRS network. I left mine in optimized mode which meant the browser resized everything for my screen and aligned it in one column, so I only needed to use the 5-key navigation pad to move a page down at a time. You can also disable images, auto complete, JavaScript and cookies to streamline further. On devices like the i-Mate SP series browsing is for the foolhardy, on the Palm Treo 650 it's for everyone.

Messaging is one of the Palm Treo 650's strengths and Versa Mail does indeed live up to its name. Microsoft has licensed the Exchange Active Sync protocol to Palm One which has enabled them to incorporate OTA synchronization to Microsoft Exchange servers without the need to use third-party software. Versa Mail supports up to 8 e-mail accounts at the same time using an array of standards including POP, IMAP, Exchange Active Sync etc and I loved the % progress when sending messages.

Other software included a very smart Calculator that had all sorts of advanced functionality including a statistics calculator, weight and temperature conversions, finance + much more. Sadly I found it to be the most unstable feature of the 650. On most of the calculator modes I could repeatedly reset the device simply by typing in some numbers and choosing a function key.

The camera was a standard VGA 640x480. With 2x zoom, pictures were surprisingly crisp and clear, and the video likewise was quite smooth. Although most devices these days have at least 1.3mb cameras, I can only surmise the Treo 650 had 640x480 due to technical issues or Palm scrimping on its storage space.

I was disappointed to find the Palm Treo 650 doesn't do handwritten text entries. My first instinct with the memo application was to grab the stylus and start writing, yet this was a no-go. I went shopping once again and found a 3rd party application which would support my undecipherable writing.

Connectivity

No Wi-Fi! 'elp!...With so many Smart phones and PDAs available now suppliers need to focus on delivering devices that offer a positive differentiating factor for the consumer. While this isn't such a big deal for smart phones, the 650 is a fully fledged PDA as well as phone. Internet surfing with the Blazer web browser is very usable, and it would be terrific to have the option of using Wi-Fi over and above GPRS or CDMA 1xRTT mobile data networks.

It does however, have Bluetooth for your wireless headset and synchronization with your desktop.

The Phone

I was surprised to learn from the various people I phoned, they could hear me a lot more clearly when I was on speaker phone than not. Perhaps I had too much noise around me with the microphone at the back, nonetheless, I could hear them perfectly and I wouldn't want to change that.

Finger access to phone numbers, contacts, speaker phone, hold etc was a breeze.

The Eveready battery

I received the Palm Treo 650 fully laden with charge and for a few days after its arrival I just idly admired it from afar, using it as a basic phone and a lazy method to check e-mail from the couch. After a week it was almost redlining so I charged it up again and then spent a pleasant evening surfing, reliving my childhood playing Space Invaders, getting to grips with the PIM functionality and synchronizing with cable and Bluetooth. The following morning rigor mortis had well and truly set in. Turning off Bluetooth, limiting my Internet browsing and with moderate use, I was able to healthily conserve power for close to 5 days before recharging.

One of the nice features of the Palm Treo 650 is that the battery is user replaceable. Just throw a spare battery in your bag and you'll be set, although you would have to be using the device pretty heavily on a 12 hour flight to be reaching into the overhead locker for that spare.

Summary

The Smart phone term given to the Palm Treo 650 is unjust. Instinctively, it's the PDA functionality I have reviewed rather than the phone because this device looks and feels more like a PDA first and a phone second. It portrays an air of confidence that says "let me take care of business for you".

If you are looking for good, solid PDA functionality with great PIM features in a device that also supports voice, the Treo 650 will deliver. No more, no less.

If your primary use is voice, with the occasional e-mail I would be inclined to go with something a little lighter and easier on the pocket.

Pros

- Healthy and long living battery
- Good solid design
- Great e-mail connectivity and versatility.

Cons

- No graffiti data entry
- No built-in Wi-Fi
- Lack of storage
- Some system instability

Check prices on-line: <http://geekzone.pricerabber.com/se...>

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Comments



Comment posted by [janisg1](#) on 14-Jan-2006 12:17



I pretty much like my 650, but you're right, size does matter if you're just looking for a phone. Soon after I got my first PDA I wished for one that would also function as a phone. This is definitely it. I like the PC interface for Pocket PC better than Palm...the click and drag is more comfortable for me than Documents To Go, but I must say that I haven't used Doc To Go much. My biggest complaint is VersaMail. It has a tendency to "crap out" on me. It'll auto-sync mail for a few days, a week or so at the most, then all of a sudden, it stops auto-sync'ing. All I've figured out to do is delete the account on my 650 and create a new one. It'll work for awhile then I have to create a new account all over again. I'm on VersaMail v3.0. Have you run into this? Also...after having PocketPC, I got hooked on the handwriting translation function and miss it. What software are you using? I've had to have it replaced already in less 6 months of use. ;-(But, all in all, it's a pretty good product. Janis



Comment posted by [Paddy](#) on 15-Jun-2006 08:24



I had the same problem with the auto sync function. It worked for probably a month and then just stopped working. It will still retrieve the e-mail manually but not automatically at my

scheduled intervals. Does anyone know of a solution besides deleting the mail account and recreating it?



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