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T-Mobile MDA Compact III smartphone

T-Mobile tries to improve on HTC's latest handset, but has it?

by Stuart Miles published on 9 January 2007

The T-Mobile MDA Compact III is the latest PDA from makers HTC and the latest in the operator's long line of Compact variants.

Based on the HTC P3300, the smartphone is virtually identical to the HTC model apart from slight tweaks with the interface to suit the T-Mobile branding machine and the choice of CoPilot Live 6 as the accompanying GPS software rather than TomTom Navigator 6.

If you still think you've seen the MDA Compact III somewhere else, its because you have and the smartphone also goes under the moniker of the O2 Xda Orbit. Either way apart from a few tweaks they are all virtually identical with the O2 variant coming in a tasteful black while the T-Mobile and HTC variants are identical slivery grey.

The quad-band smartphone follows the slim PDA style form factor complete with large 2.8-inch touchscreen rather than providing QWERTY keyboard for those business email junkies, however it does feature a built-in GPS unit so you can source directions wherever you happen to be.

Depending on which model you opt for depends on which satnav software is shipped in the box. T-Mobile and O2 offer have rather annoyingly opted for ALK CoPilot Live 6 software while HTC saved TomTom Navigator 6 for itself.

The GPS function is the main selling point here and we found CoPilot disappointing compared to the TomTom software that is shipped with the HTC unbranded handset. Basic errors such as suggesting the pedestrian mode as simply a straight line don't help. It might work on a model that is suited for the car, but here chances are you're likely to be on foot most of the time.



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But the device isn't just about offering GPS. Other features include a 2.0 megapixel camera, MP3 player, radio and Wi-Fi functionality and if that wasn't enough all three variants run Windows Mobile OS 5 software.

In use and although the MDA Compact III lacks the keyboard the unit performs well. The inclusion of Wi-Fi and the GPS are a great addition and it's surprising that both are present as the device is rather slim - certainly compared to the Treo 750v and Treo 680.

Although the majority of tasks are done via the touchscreen that hasn't stopped HTC offering some hard buttons for quick access. Here like the P3300 you'll find the usual answer and reject buttons, shortcuts to the GPS, Internet Explorer option and menu features.

At the centre is what initially looks like a d-pad, however on closer inspection it's actually a selection wheel that, although mechanical, works in a similar way to the Apple iPod click wheel. In the centre of this wheel is a ball that is identical to the BlackBerry Pearl's control mechanism, although this one doesn't light up.

VERDICT

Although this misses the keyboard that you know you want, the hand recognition software is pretty good when it comes to writing contact details and the odd notes - we wouldn't file a story on it however.

The MDA Compact III is a great little phone come PDA for those wanting more than just a phone but not yet ready to go the whole hog and get something with a keyboard.

The inclusion of the GPS is a great feature (it's the next big thing) and if you can, however, we would recommend opting for the own brand HTC P3300 over this version as you get the better GPS solution.

At a glance

What is it?

Smartphone with GPS

Good

GPS, slim, Windows Mobile 5 OS, 2 megapixel camera

Bad

No keyboard, CoPilot software

Verdict

The T-Mobile Vario is a great little phone come PDA, it's just a shame about the GPS software

Price price dependant on contract

Our score

8/10

Your score

8/10

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We love it, but not as much as the original HTC P3300 unbranded version.