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Samsung SGH-F300 mobile phone

Can the power of two beat one?

by Stuart Miles published on 14 June 2007

You want music and you want to stay connected. What most of us do is carry two boxes; an MP3 player and a mobile phone. Samsung seeing the popularity of the Sony Ericsson Walkman brand wants to offer us its solution to the problem in the guise of the SGH-F300.

The F300 is a mobile phone that thinks it's an MP3 player and an MP3 player that thinks it's a phone.

Called the "Ultra Music" device, and a part of Samsung's "Ultra Edition" range on first glance the mobile phone looks more like a Casio calculator from the 1980s rather than a piece of cutting edge technology from the 21st century.

The phone's design is dominated by the rather large keypad and as a result, the phone's screen is tiny, and we mean tiny, it's just three lines of text and struggles to even give you space to write text messages let alone display a number.

Above the keypad is what seems to be an even larger d-pad with the usual array of shortcut buttons normally found on standard Samsung phones including call, hang-up, a shortcut to the built-in digital camera, a cancel button and two further menu buttons. Above the tiny screen is a 2 megapixel digital camera, which as you can imagine is almost impossible to see the results on that miniscule screen.

Looking at it from this angle in the office, I would be rather embarrassed to tell you the truth to put it on my desk, and it certainly wouldn't get a show on the table in the pub.

Inside and the interface is very much a paired down version of that found on the company's other Ultra Edition phones. You have to scroll laboriously from left to right to find the right choice rather than being presented with a screen that



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offers 3 icons wide by 3 icons deep and quick access to the menu you want.

It's not then until you flip the phone over to what would normally be a dull looking back that you realise what Samsung has done with the F300. The rear of the phone, or the front of the MP3 player depending on how you see it sports a large 2.1-inch screen, a touch sensitive d-pad and access to the players music features via the press of a single button that switches modes from phone to MP3 player.

The interface all of a sudden resembles Samsung's standard MP3 player offering including access to music, the phones camera, video, radio and a voice recorder feature.

The menu system looks almost identical to the company's K3 and K5 models and is easy to use and navigate with the buttons being responsive to your touch rather like the company's U600 mobile phone.

Music and other media like videos and photos can be stored on the phones internal memory (100MB), or more preferentially - a hot swappable 1GB microSD card included in the box.

Interesting concept, but does it actually work? While the two elements work well, we still can't fathom why Samsung has insisted on keeping them separate but within the same device.

It's as if the company doesn't really trust its customers to be savvy enough to work out how to use a menu system to access its MP3 software. We would much prefer to have use of the bigger screen all the time, a la every other phone on the market, rather than just for loading a music track on a device that for the most of the time will be in the pocket.

While you're still puzzling over the "why", there are other issues we have with the phone.

At a glance

What is it?

Music-focused mobile phone

Good

Fully fledged MP3 player, 1GB microSD card in the box

Bad

Why, why, why?

Verdict

On their own, the two elements are average, together two averages certainly don't make a good, and in fact are worst off for the marriage

Price Price dependent on contract

Our score

4/10

Your score

7/10

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The battery isn't replaceable for starters, as there is no back casing to slide off - its been replaced with a screen and buttons remember. This also has a knock on effect to the placing of your Sim card. Yep that's right, it along with the microSD card is hot swappable, making it incredibly easy for someone to grab while your not looking. They might not have got your phone, but the culprit will be busy making calls around the world before you know what's happened.

Then there is the insistence that you have to use Samsung's headphone cable rather than just a 3.5mm jack straight on the unit. Even more annoying is that the same socket is the charging socket so you can't have the phone connected to your speakers and charging at the same time.

VERDICT

Every so often a device comes along where its creators haven't really thought about the "why", but just the "because we can" and the Samsung F300 is the epitome of this.

On there own, the two elements are average, together two averages certainly don't make a good, and in fact are worst off for the marriage.