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Motorola Z8 mobile phone

Can Moto become king of video on the go?

by Stuart Miles published on 10 August 2007

The next generation of mobile phones is all about music isn't it? Wrong, that was last year's message and perhaps realising that they've missed the boat against the likes of Sony Ericsson's Walkman range and the yet to be launched iPhone, Motorola's latest handset, the Moto Z8 boasts video as its main feature.

So what's it like? Following our first look review earlier in the year, we've now got our mitts on a review unit. So does it live up to our first expectations? Read on to find out.

When we first got the phone we have to admit we were very excited, it looks great and you can see that lots of attention has been paid to the detail.

The design is a cross between a slider and a clamshell and so the end result is what Motorola are calling a "Kick slider" that you guessed it, kicks out. In use what this basically means is that it fits better to your face as it bends around than moving on a swivel hinge.

In practice however and although this leaves plenty of room for the screen we found the keys that it revealed awkward to use and unresponsive to touch. It's not that by pressing a key you have a delay in the number appearing on the screen, it's just that you don't know whether or not you've pressed it without looking at the screen.

Coming in a black and fetching lime green, the phone also sports a largish display, which Motorola hopes you think are great for viewing videos on. We would have liked it to be bigger (wouldn't we all), but it was ample for watching short programs as long as you opt for the full screen mode which rotates the image so you watch it landscape rather than profile.

Where the screen wins out however, is that it



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supports 16 million rather than just the average 262k colours and has a frame rate of 30fps rather than the average 24.

To show of its movie credentials, Motorola is shipping a copy of Bourne Identity in the box and we were surprised that we felt comfortable watching the whole film on the train on such a small screen - something we didn't expect to do. While the screen struggled with the very dark opening scenes, you could clearly read subtitles without having to strain.

Of course with support for the hot-swappable microSD card up to the current 4GB SDHC cards you can transfer your own movies or programs over to watch on the go and it will certainly make train journeys go quicker.

The movie player called Mobiclick is basic and won't allow for chapter skip, however the software will remember where you last left off and allow you to resume the video where you left off, even it has been a couple of days.

Finally on the Multimedia side of things the Motorola Z8 comes with Sky's Anytime application installed as standard. You can sign up for a 30 day free trial and then access to 20 Sky channels to watch on the go and more importantly access to the Sky electronic program guide so you can set your Sky box to record stuff even if you aren't at home.

To help watching movies Motorola is also including its Bluetooth S9 headphones in the box as well. While the phone does have a speaker its far easier to tune in with the headband headset.

Connecting the two devices is as easy as typing in the pairing code and again improves the experience no end on the train as you aren't fighting cables. One word of disappointment was that although you can control music options via the controls on the headset you can't control movie functions.

At a glance

What is it?

Video-focused mobile phone

Good

Screen quality, design, interface, headphones, movie in the box

Bad

Is that screen going to be big enough?

Verdict

Forget the RAZR2, it's the MOTO Z8 you'll be wanting

Price Price dependant on contract

Our score

7/10

Your score

?/10

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Battery life for the phone depends heavily on what you do and watching video does suck more juice than if you were just making phone calls. We managed 2 days of calls and video watching although towards the end of the second day we were getting low battery warnings.

Rather than just be a one trick multimedia pony, the Z8 also has HSDPA connectivity, a 2 megapixel camera, and runs on a Symbian OS interface rather than the annoying menu system Motorola is famous for.

VERDICT

So what's the catch? Well, while we loved the Z8 when it first arrived, with each passing day we are liking it less and less. Starting from the top, the screen isn't big enough, the keypad annoying, and the interface still confusing (all the icons look the same).

That isn't to say this is a bad handset and we commend Motorola for doing what've they done with the video, the screen, the 3.5G connectivity, it's just we aren't gagging to keep this model longer than we have to, and we think that after an 18 month contract we would have got very frustrated indeed.