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Nokia 8800 Arte mobile phone

Can this compete against the Vertu?

by James Osterberg Jr published on 6 February 2008

If you're like the majority of the phone-buying public and haven't got the wonga to afford the obscenely expensive Vertu phones, then Nokia's own select band of premium handsets have proved a godsend.

Admittedly, the likes of the 8600 Luna and 8800 Sirocco could still cost a wallet-haemorrhaging £450-550 SIM-free (the Sirocco Gold version blings in at £800) or free on an expensive monthly contract, but at least these aspirational handsets were attainable without receiving a concerned phone call from the bank manager.

Nokia's latest passenger on its luxury cruise is the 8800 Arte, follow-up to the Sirocco and the first of its classy fashionistas to actually deliver some feature clout to match the undoubted style. The inclusion of original flavoured 3G (finally!) and a 3.2-megapixel snapper will be welcomed by those disappointed with the Sirocco's previous vacuous feature set.

The Arte maintains its predecessor's immaculate build quality and minimalist design. It has been meticulously carved from stainless steel and carries that reassuring but pocket-sagging heft. Its vital stats are also almost identical to the Sirocco, although its design is sharper and profile slightly trimmer.

To fight the inevitable greasy smears that soil stainless steel veneers, Nokia has coated the front fascia in an anti-fingerprint paint. It works to certain extent but the rounded edges still manage to attract oily smudges. The Finnish outfit has also protected the stunning 2-inch OLED QVGA-quality display with scratch-resistant glass.

The signature spring-assisted slider action is still the best in business. The greased-up ball bearings make it incredibly fluid and you'll find yourself idly opening and shutting the phone just



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to hear that satisfying clunk.

After the niggly keypad on the Sirocco, we're pleased to report there is no usability issue with the Arte in this respect. While its keypad arrangement looks similarly cramped, the buttons' bevelled edges make it great to thumb. Otherwise, the Arte plays out like other Nokia phones: intuitive and granny simple to operate.

The Arte also lets you brilliantly tailor the homescreen with a fiesta of shortcuts including a top scrolling bar to access popular features such as music player, calendar, web search and general indicators detailing new messages, appointments, etc.

Nokia has fitted the Arte with a couple of quirky but useful tricks. Firstly, you can mute the incoming call ringtone without actually killing the call, simply by turning the phone face down while if you need to discreetly check the time, just tap the phone below the display and an analogue clock will appear. However our review sample didn't seem at all receptive to our light pats or firm prods.

The 3.2-megapixel camera with autofocus is pretty decent but don't expect pin-sharp K810i Cyber-shot picture quality. Snaps are blighted with a hint of digital noise and a magenta tinge but it won't spoil your appreciation. However, the lack of any flash or macro focus is disappointing. Video capture on the other hand is surprisingly slick and easy on the eye, shooting in a 640 x 480 pixel resolution.

Elsewhere, the built-in music player spins the standard MP3, AAC, eAAC+ and WMA formats. It's great to use and sounds lively, with a seven-band equalisers to adapt the audio and support for stereo Bluetooth. But with only 1GB of internal memory and no memory card slot handy, the music player's talents become severely limited. Sure, you can use it like an entry-level Apple shuffle or Creative Stone but remember the

At a glance

What is it?

Luxury fashion phone

Good

High grade build quality and elegant minimalist design, slide action is still the best in the business, decent feature line-up

Bad

No expansion plan for the internal 1GB flash memory, high asking price

Verdict

Undoubtedly Nokia's finest premium handset to date that oozes style and quality with a feature cast that will satisfy the rich-boy gadget geeks

Price price dependant on contract

Our score

8/10

Your score

10/10

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memory has to be shared with all your other multimedia clobber.

VERDICT

The superior build quality of Nokia's 8800 series has never been questioned but its feature line-up always felt like an after-thought. The 8800 Arte goes a long way to tackling this frustration. Not only is it the most design refined of the 8800 posse but the most feature-realised as well.

The lack of expandable memory is a concern, as is the price. Carphone Warehouse is currently offering the Arte for £500 with an 18 month contract at £35 a month. It's a whopping outlay, but if you can afford to splash the cash, you will be in possession of a highly exclusive and ,ber-deluxe handset.