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Sony Ericsson W980 mobile phone - First Look

Can this replace your iPod?

by Stuart Miles published on 14 February 2008

The Sony Ericsson W980 is the company's latest flagship Walkman handset, but can it bring anything to the mix that the current range doesn't? We managed to get a hands-on with the new phone at this year's Mobile World Congress in Barcelona.

The chamshell design offers a shiny mirrored finish on the top with a clear bar below and appears at first glance to be devoid of buttons, just a collection of rounded indents.

Around the back and the matt black finish keeps the feel to a minimalist level and only the small lens hole suggests a camera is included.

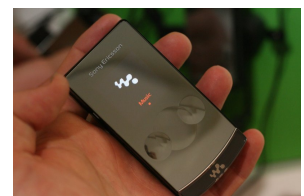
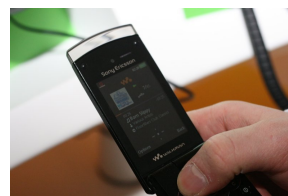
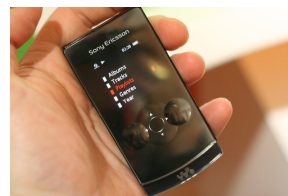
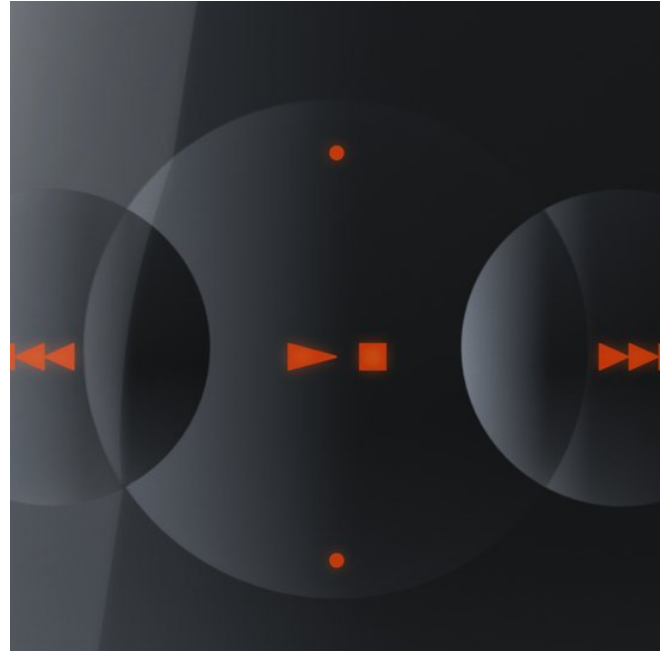
The sides offer a shutter and volume control, and a power socket, disappointingly for a music-focused phone, no 3.5mm socket, with Sony Ericsson opting for headphone connection via its specific dongle.

Controls for the phone when shut are via that collection of rounded indents on the front of the phone and in the music mode the idea, Sony Ericsson tell us, is that it is more akin to a MP3 player rather than mobile.

Those looking for that extra disco effect, the clear bar at the bottom lights up and flashes when the music is playing. Very tacky.

When on, the collection of indents become a play, stop, fast-forward, rewind and menu buttons with full control over the music elements of the phone allowing you to move through menus and select tracks, etc.

Of course you have all the same functionality when you open the handset with a clear keypad layout that isn't prickly like previous outings in any



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way.

As with all Walkman handsets there is a dedicated music button to get you to the player straightaway and the menu interface is either a grid option or Sony Ericsson's new scroll menu similar to the PSP or PS3 interface.

Allowing you to get the most out of the music elements of the phone, the W980 comes with 8GB of memory (which will allow you to store around 8000 tracks) as well as a Memory Stick M2 slot to store music on as well as a TrackID, the company's music finding service.

Additionally Sony Ericsson say it has really concentrated on improving the sound presumably to take on Samsung and its Bang & Oulfsen team -up.

In our brief play the sound was very impressive both via a connected set of headphones and via the built-in stereo speaker.

The phone will come bundled with Sony Ericsson's Stereo Portable Handsfree HPM-77 headphones and boasts FM radio and a built-in FM transmitter great for broadcasting to nearby stereos or for in-car listening.

The W980 also removes the need to have a headset connected to act as an antenna so you now listen to radio with a jumble of cables - a welcome feature.

Get past the music functions and there is still a good phone here.

Amazingly for the size the phone sports HSPDA, Bluetooth 2.0 and a 3.2 megapixel camera alongside the usual Sony Ericsson software applications like the Blogger tool that lets you upload your images straight to a Blogger page on the Web.

VERDICT

The W980 is one of the best Walkman phones yet

At a glance

What is it?

Music-focused phone

Good

8GB memory, front chamshell interface, Sony Ericsson apps

Bad

Small screen, flimsy

Verdict

The W980 looks likely to be a must-have phone for music fans in 2008

Price price dependant on contract

Your score

9/10

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with some really good features that will make it stand out from the crowd when it comes to offering music on the go.

Although our play was brief we love the music interface on the front which means you don't actually have to open the phone to use the MP3 player.

The addition of a FM transmitter for the car is equally good.

In fact the music credentials look to be so good on this handset that it may force Sony to abandon the MP3 player market altogether.

What's the catch? Well the handset did feel a bit flimsy to touch with Sony Ericsson opting for plastic over metal in the design, and the screen coming up a bit on the small side.

However this still looks like an impressive handset and certainly one for music fans to watch.

The Sony Ericsson W980 will be available in Q3 2008.