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Sony Ericsson W350i mobile phone

Worth the all hype?

by Chris Hall published on 5 August 2008

The Sony Ericsson W350i is instantly recognisable because of the strength of the marketing behind it. But should you consider getting one? We find out.

The W350 comes under the Walkman banner so has a strong focus on music, but has a somewhat gawky design. It is candybar-ish, but with a flip down flap over the keys. This flap serves one major purpose and that is to give you external controls over the music player whilst keeping a slim design. As a result, the phone is a compact 104 x 43 x 11mm, so slips easily into any pocket or bag.

Sticking with these external controls, they offer the normal stop/play, forward and backward controls and also an up and down for navigating the Walkman menu, as accessed via a button on the left-hand side. On the right-hand side you'll find a volume controller and lurking on the top is a hold slider, meaning you can lock all of these controls down and it seems perfectly up to the job with a good solid action.

The matt black and orange livery might be a little retro-seventies but there is no denying that the W350 is a fairly cool-looking phone. Flip open that flap to access the keys and the phone loses its mojo. To make the external Walkman controls, Sony Ericsson have basically used the flap as a push-through control, so the flap is very thin allowing the top controls to push the buttons underneath.

The result is that the flap is an affront to the otherwise good build-quality. The flap is then right in the way when you try to access the keys: an obstruction when dialling and texting, because it sticks right into your palm. In this case, Sony Ericsson have sacrificed function for form.

Sticking with the Walkman theme, the supplied



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headphones are the two-stage type where you plug into a dongle with the standard Sony Ericsson connection on it, as there is (again) no 3.5mm jack. You could plug your own headphones into the dongle, but you'd then have enough headphone cordage to hang yourself. However, the supplied headphones actually deliver good results, but don't come with any options for different sized ears.

These gripes aside, the sound quality from the phone is very good, as the Walkman logo suggests. If it wasn't for the ridiculous flap that makes the phone impractical, and the awkward headphone arrangement, we'd be happy to listen to this: but then it would just be a Walkman.

Turn to the phone itself, there is little in the way of surprises here: it is standard Sony Ericsson stuff, wearing a slightly different coat. There is the defacto 1.3MP uninspiring camera on the back and a diminutive 176 x 220 pixel screen but I guess it is unfair to praise the compact form and curse the small screen, but there you go.

The spec sheet lacks any of the more high-tech options, this is a straight down the line tri-band GSM/EDGE phone, with no Wi-Fi or advanced features. Storage is a laughable 14MB, but it does come with a 512MB Memory Stick Micro (M2) card which unfortunately slots in under the back cover rather than being easily accessible.

The intuitive menus have the normal array of Sony Ericsson goodies with TrackID and so on. There is also a Guitar Legend game to really emphasise the music action going on here. You'll also find that the default screen when the flap is closed is the Walkman, so this is very much a music player with a phone built-in.

As you'd expect, making and receiving calls gives you a good quality experience as we have come to expect from Sony Ericsson with the flip to answer option, which saves scrabbling to get to the answer button. You also get Bluetooth so that

At a glance

What is it?

Walkman phone

Good

External controls, hold slider, simple, headphones are not too bad

Bad

No external memory expansion, no 3.5mm jack, cheap flap obstructs the keys

Verdict

Although the Walkman side of the W350 delivers a reasonable quality of sound, the mobile phone aspects of this device really disappoint

Price Dependent on contract

Our score

6/10

Your score

?/10

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you could broadcast your music to an external speaker set - preferable to the in-built speaker - but that on-board speaker is one of the better we have heard.

VERDICT

Although the Walkman side of the W350 delivers a reasonable quality of sound, the mobile phone aspects of this device really disappoint: whilst the slimline design looks fairly crisp, the flap is cheap and flimsy and obstructs access to the keys. The headphones are good quality, but having to use the Sony Ericsson dongle is, once again, a real letdown.