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Toshiba Portege G910 mobile phone

Your mobile office in clamshell

by Chris Hall published on 13 August 2008

We have seen several Toshiba mobile phones with mixed results recently. How does the PortégÉ G910, a full QWERTY offering, fare? We go mobile to find out.

From the outside that design looks somewhat unusual, a grey face with a black spine, looking like a cigarette case from an early Bond movie.

On the front you'll find a small two-line display that will give you details of the phone's status - battery life, etc, as well as details of incoming calls. It also pairs up with the four-way control beneath which give basic access to features, for example, contacts. You'll also find the standard call accept and reject buttons here.

Flip the device over and you'll find most of the rear dominated by the battery cover, which is rather flimsy and won't stand repeated removal too much. There is also the 2-megapixel camera, which comes with an illuminator-type flash.

Open the device up and you are faced with a decent sized QWERTY keyboard, which is actually very nice to use, except for one irritating feature that we found in the G710: the inability to shift characters by pressing and holding a key. This means that if you want the "-" on the "F" key, you have to press the green spot to enter the alternative characters. Press and hold would only produce "ffffff". A minor point, but one that can really slow down text input.

The top half of the device is dominated by the 3-inch, 800 x 480, LCD display, which is nice and crisp. The hinge design means you can sit this like a tiny laptop and use the keyboard to bash out some emails, or browse the Internet whilst on the move.

The downside of that hinge design is that it can be difficult to get to the screen (although you can



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do most things from the keyboard). Also, the hinge doesn't fold flat, or allow it to be used like a tablet, which is a little restrictive.

There is a stylus included which is as good as useless - it is so thin it almost bends at every screen press and is difficult to hold - replacement should not be too much of an issue, but whether it will fit in the hole is a different matter.

Down the side of the screen you'll find various shortcut options, contacts, calendar, media player and so on. At first attempt we thought they weren't working, as they need a firm press to launch the service you want. All these buttons are customisable, so you can swap-out Internet Explorer for Opera and so on as you wish, which makes them much more practical for everyday use.

Of course, the operating system here is Windows Mobile 6, so this is really pitched at business road warriors who can sync with the office and then get going. There is nothing on top of Windows Mobile, no shell to improve the user experience, like you'll find in HTC devices. For those looking to get some work done it also features the full Office Mobile programmes, so you can create documents on the move.

The tech specs also reflect the business focus: you'll find heaps of connectivity, including Wi-Fi, and not just 3G, but the HSDPA variety, making this a good device for data on the move. You'll also find Bluetooth as you'd expect. Windows Mobile also unfortunately means media functions are handled by Media Player, and whilst you can listen to music on the go, it is an experience that leaves you wanting.

In the box you get a handsfree kit of a proprietary 10-pin plug type, but you can plug your own headphones into the dongle, which is the best option as those supplied are extremely poor quality. Whilst on the topic of media, we tried to play a variety of video clips, all of which struggled,

At a glance

What is it?

QWERTY clamshell smartphone

Good

Excellent screen, good keyboard

Bad

Design somewhat vintage, external controls a little too fiddly, no GPS software

Verdict

The keyboard is great to use and the screen is good and bright; other little design features are a frustration, resulting in a package that just doesn't seem to want to make life easy for you

Price £400

Our score

6/10

Your score

?/10

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even small WMV files. There is a microSD card slot on the top for memory expansion or to add media.

Down the side of the device you'll also find a fingerprint reader which weirdly acts as an application launcher - presumably third-party software could convert this into a security feature. It can also be set to scroll through options on the screen, but this is a non-starter really.

There is also a handy volume control that will slip into vibrate or silent modes once you reach the bottom of the scale. Sadly there is no vibrate and ring option, a firm favourite with office workers. The internal speaker is also poor, so those looking to conference call will struggle: the quality is bad and the volume never really loud enough.

To round out the spec sheet there is also an included GPS receiver, but sadly no software to support this, so you'll have to source your own before you can use it, which we feel lets the side down somewhat.

VERDICT

The Portégé G910 almost delivers. The keyboard is great to use and the screen is good and bright; Windows Mobile offers you perfunctory support for all your basic office tasks. The spec sheet looks good, giving you all the connections you need, GPS, HSDPA, Wi-Fi.

But sadly, things just don't come together. The external controls are fiddly to use, it takes an age and you'll end up opening the device to select your contact, then closing to talk to them, and with this being a mobile phone, that presents something of a problem.

Other little design features are a frustration, resulting in a package that just doesn't seem to want to make life easy for you, and at £400 there are plenty of other options.