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Sony Ericsson Xperia X1 mobile phone - First Look

Can this challenge the smartphone kings?

by Stuart Miles published on 19 September 2008

Sony Ericsson has made its first foray in recent years into the smartphone market with the new X1, but can the consumer company crack it against the HTC's, Palms, BlackBerrys and Apple iPhones of this world? We grabbed 30 minutes with the new handset at the UK launch to find out.

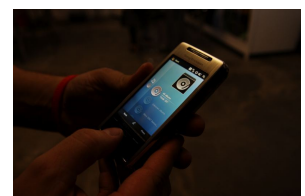
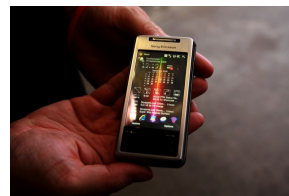
Measuring 110 x 53 x 16.7mm the slider design features a 3-inch touchscreen display on the front and a slide-out QWERTY keyboard underneath. The touchscreen dominates the front of the unit, although not enough that there isn't space for a number of shortcut keys at the bottom of the handset. Elsewhere there is the usual dedicated button for controlling the 3.2-megapixel camera as well as volume controls.

The keyboard is concave in its design, curving into the middle row of keys. The result is a strange one at first, however we soon got used to it in our brief play. The pull-out motion is smooth, and interestingly, rather than put an accelerometer in the device as with virtually every other handset manufacturer, Sony Ericsson has opted to leave it out. Instead the landscape mode is controlled merely by a switch associated with the keyboard.

Beyond the design, which does hark more towards the HTC Diamond than a BlackBerry, the main focus here is the tech inside and the customisation of Microsoft Windows Mobile 6.1.

The tech list reads like your typical high-end smartphone device: HSDPA, Wi-Fi, AGPS, 3.2-megapixel camera, Bluetooth, optical joystick navigation, 400MB of internal memory, microSD card slot and a 528MHz ARM 11 processor.

All are welcome inclusions and the performance



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of the software, while still sluggish at times, is vastly improved on previous versions of the X1 we've been shown since the device's announcement in February 2008.

The model we played with at the UK launch wasn't a final version either with a Sony Ericsson spokesperson confirming that one more software update was expected before the device started to ship on the 30 September.

When it comes to software, like the Palm Treo Pro (also built by HTC) there are a lot of HTC features present. The task bar is the main one that allows you to manage your applications that are open and close them without opening the app in question. It saves time and is a useful addition.

Then there is press to focus on the digital camera interface that allows you to quickly let the camera focus on any part of the picture by pressing the screen to focus in that area. It was a technology Sony Ericsson first showed and included in the G900 and the X1 gets it too.

But the main crux is something Sony Ericsson calls Panels, and while it's software based, it even gets its own dedicated shortcut key on the handset underneath the screen.

Pressing the "Panels" button gives you a screen that allows you to select a panel that gives you access to a certain area of the phone. Sony Ericsson gives you a number of panels to begin with that make it easy to see what's what, giving you quick access to your multimedia content or the Google search engine for example.

If you can't find a panel that you like, you can download more from the Sony Ericsson website via your phone.

The premise is that it allows you manage and customise your homepage to what you want rather than what Microsoft or Sony Ericsson has assumed you want.

At a glance

What is it?

Smartphone from Sony Ericsson

Good

Tech specs

Bad

No wow factor

Verdict

For us the Xperia X1 looks like it's a valid attempt from Sony Ericsson, but the market is so crowded that it struggles to stand out from the pack

Price price dependent on contract

Your score

?/10

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There are two ways of displaying the list of panels: a grid like system, which is easy to use, and a fan based one that looks like the Aero feature in Vista. Like the desktop offering, it's fairly pointless and makes viewing and choosing the Panel you want hard. It might look pretty but it's not something we would recommend using.

VERDICT

For us the Xperia X1 looks like it's a valid attempt from Sony Ericsson, but the market is so crowded that it struggles to stand out from the pack.

It's not that it's not feature packed - it is - but in our brief play we weren't blown away and when you are fighting against the iPhone, the Palm Treo Pro and the BlackBerry Bold you need to have that wow factor.

That view might change once we've had a better look at the handset over a longer period of time, but for now its one to look at with caution.