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Sony Ericsson W980 mobile phone

Does this flippin' Walkman phone impress?

by Chris Hall published on 6 October 2008

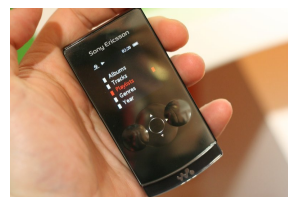
The Sony Ericsson W980 brings many of the design features found on other Walkman handsets and puts the full clout of the phone company behind them. So how does it fare?

An unmistakable Sony Ericsson design, this is a fairly large phone, resulting in a keyboard that is well spaced. The keys are ringed in silver and set in a glossy black interior giving the phone something of a deco look and feel. As is common, the 240 x 320 screen in the top of the phone, whilst good and clear, looks a little small. That signature screen surround is perhaps getting a little long in the tooth and the overall effect suffers as a result in these modern times.

But a large part of the W980 is about having the phone closed, and as we've seen with a number of other models, you get to control your music from the outside using the three touch-sensitive circle design now synonymous with Walkman phones. The top of the phone also features an external display which will tell you just about all you need to know whilst on the move. When the screen is out of use, it vanishes beneath the gloss surface, something that Sony Ericsson do very well. The clear plastic bottom bar will also flash in time with your music - although we can't imagine this option will be turned on for long.

The result of all these glossy surfaces is an absolute fingerprint magnet and you'll spend a good deal of your time cleaning this phone both inside and out, but we'll let that one go. You do get a dedicated Walkman button internally to jump right to the music, and externally you get a neat navigation button to switch from your standby screen, to radio, to Walkman, making it a breeze to use. A hold slider locks down the controls whilst in your pocket or bag.

This being Sony Ericsson, however, you get the



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same old dongle experience as you do in other models and this being a dedicated music handset, it is amazing that they still haven't seen fit to include a 3.5mm jack for headphones. To get round this, perhaps, the bundled headphones are better than many, but still a far cry from decent independent headphones. Still, you can plug your own into the dongle if you can handle all the extra cable that introduces.

Supporting those music credentials you'll find a respectable 8GB of on-board memory, meaning around 2000 or so songs, depending on quality and so on. But you also get an FM transmitter which is a real bonus for making the W980 your sole music device - you can easily transmit your tunes in your car or to any other radio without the worry of wires.

The layout of the menus will be instantly familiar to Sony Ericsson fans, the big clean icons lovingly and simply taking you off to where you want to go. Navigation is fast and we only occasionally found any sign of lag when entering into parts of a menu. Here you'll find the normal SE features like PlayNow, SenseMe and TrackID, as well as access to your games and other media functions.

As this phone features HSDPA, you also get the benefit of full fat mobile internet to take advantage of the likes of RSS feeds and browser, although with a screen this size, if you really want the Internet on the move you're better off looking elsewhere. It is a quad-band model so will see you good around the world.

For those looking to take advantage of the 8MP for photos you will find a 3.2MP camera on the back of the lower part of the phone, which unfortunately tends to fall under your finger when you are holding the phone out, so is not the most convenient for taking photos as you have to shift your hand down meaning it is both less comfortable and less stable. There is no flash either, so it is fairly limited in its deployment.

VERDICT

For fans of Sony Ericsson devices this is true
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At a glance

What is it?

Clamshell Walkman phone

Good

Sounds great, external Walkman controls, great screen, headphones better than average

Bad

Screen a little small, no 3.5mm jack, little innovation

Verdict

Whilst it performs in all areas, there is little innovation here to really get excited about

Price Dependent on contract

Our score

7/10

Your score

?/10

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enough to their line-up over the past years to offer the same comfortable experience. But for those looking for something a little different, there is nothing here to really get excited about. Sure enough, it works well as an MP3 player on the move with ample storage space. It is perhaps unfortunate there is no external slot, as a microSD card could have made music expansion really simple.

As a clamshell it does make for a comfortable phone for actually making phonecalls, something that can get a little lost with devices wanting to be everything in your pocket, but when all is said and done, this is a very formulaic effort from Sony Ericsson with little to get excited about.