

First Look Should you buy an iPhone?

With the initial clamor about Apple's first cell phone now over, non-Apple aficionados can ponder whether to pony up \$499 or \$599 for the device, which combines a phone with an MP3 player, Web browser, camera, and PDA functions.

Our early tests of the iPhone, performed as this issue went to press, revealed a few shortcomings, including a battery you can't replace yourself. But we also found groundbreaking features. Most notably, the iPhone offers superb multimedia functionality via its unique touchscreen, from which you access almost all the device's controls and can move and enlarge photos and Web pages with your fingertips. Here are issues to consider if you're still on the iFence.

As a phone: The device is so-so in voice quality and lacks some common phone features, such as voice activation and easy access to a directory of recent calls. AT&T, the iPhone's exclusive carrier, has been low to middling in satisfaction in our recent surveys. And the iPhone uses AT&T's Edge network, which is slow for Web surfing. (Surfing is much faster with the phone's Wi-Fi connection.)

If your current phone is under contract, you'll need to pay that out or pay a termination fee up

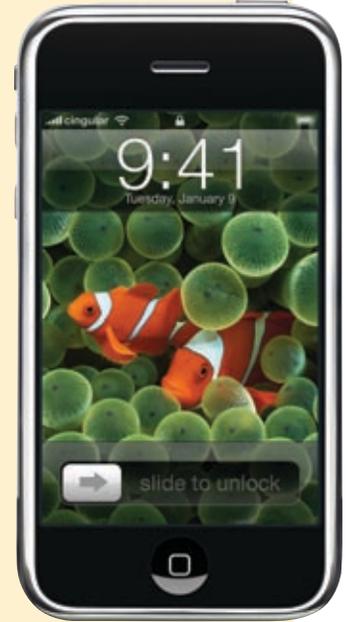
to \$200. (If you already have a contract with AT&T, the termination fee will be waived.)

As an MP3 player: The iPhone excels, with the best player built into a phone we've ever tested and a new, appealing interface. Capacity is 4 gigabytes—about 1,000 songs—for the \$499 iPhone, 8GB for the \$599 model.

As a text-messaging device: The iPhone's text-entry interface is fine and easy enough to learn. But using it is very different from sending text messages on the QWERTY keyboard found on most smart phones. Speed texters on that type of keyboard might want to stick with it.

As a PDA: The device has drawbacks. Although you can view documents, you can't edit or create them, and entering calendar appointments is not as easy as with Palm Treos and most BlackBerrys. Setting up e-mail, however, is a breeze.

CR's take: The iPhone is at least competent at all key tasks, and its software and interactive screen integrate those functions in a seamless and largely successful way. Buy it now and you'll get a versatile, innovative device with a high price and a few warts. Future versions may well address some of those shortcomings and cost less, too.



A CLEAR VIEW The iPhone's 3½-inch screen is the largest and most legible we've ever seen on a phone.

NEW MPG FIGURES TO REFLECT REAL-WORLD CONDITIONS

Starting this fall, the government's miles-per-gallon estimates for 2008 cars will be based on a more realistic method. The bad news is that the numbers will almost certainly be lower.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency made the change because the old method, developed in the 1970s, didn't reflect modern driving conditions or cars. Many vehicles today spend more than half their time in stop-and-go traffic, where fuel economy is worst. Speed limits have risen—from 55 mph on highways nationwide in the mid-1970s to as high as 80 mph today—and fuel economy can drop 25 percent when vehicles go faster. (A 4-cylinder 2005 Toyota Camry we tested got 10 fewer miles per gallon at 75



How they compare

The EPA is revising miles-per-gallon estimates for old and new cars. Below, the changes in overall mileage for several recent-model cars, along with CR's mileage, calculated from our tests.

| Vehicle | Old EPA | New EPA | CR |
|--------------------|---------|---------|--------|
| 2004 Toyota Prius | 55 mpg | 46 mpg | 44 mpg |
| 2006 Honda Civic | 34 | 30 | 28 |
| 2006 Chevy Impala | 22 | 20 | 20 |
| 2007 Toyota Sienna | 22 | 19 | 19 |
| 2006 Ford Explorer | 17 | 15 | 15 |

than at 55.) Air conditioning, which can reduce fuel mileage by about 1 mpg at 65 mph, is also much more common.

The new mpg tests will include use of air conditioning as

well as aggressive driving. And because fuel efficiency can drop with the temperature, some tests will be performed in cold temperatures.

The EPA's change in calcu-

lation is long overdue. In a study conducted in 2005, CONSUMER REPORTS compared the agency's estimates with real-world mileage based on our tests of 303 cars and trucks from model years 2000 to 2006. We found that about 90 percent of the vehicles had mileage worse than the federal data. Gasoline-powered cars averaged 9 percent fewer miles per gallon overall. The biggest gap was in city mileage, which was on average about 30 percent lower than the EPA rating.

For a taste of how the estimates vary, see the chart at left. Other EPA estimates are available at www.fueleconomy.gov. Fuel-saving tips and lists of vehicles that get the best mileage are free at www.ConsumerReports.org/fuel.

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