

Review: \$100 Palm Pixi is stylish but sluggish

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In this photo made Monday, Nov. 16, 2009, the Palm Pixi from Sprint is shown in San Francisco. (AP Photo/Russel A. Daniels)

(AP) -- Palm Inc. is fighting harder than ever to snag a chunk of the smart phone market, and just six months after releasing the stylish Pre it's back with a lighter, more petite and affordable version called the Pixi.

It's too bad such a good-looking phone is so aggravating to use.

With its trim candy bar-shaped body, full keyboard and \$100 price tag (with a two-year [Sprint Nextel](#) contract and \$150 in rebates), it's clear that Palm is aiming the Pixi at younger, text messaging-savvy consumers.

The Pixi is one of the most attractive phones I've seen. Its glossy black face features a crisp-though-diminutive 2.6-inch touch screen and a full

keyboard that's about the size of a Pink Pearl eraser. The keys are the sticky, rubbery kind familiar to Palm fans. In between the screen and keyboard sits a small area where you make finger swipes to switch between applications.

The Pixi felt great in my hand. The sides of the device are rounded and its sides and back are a matte, rubberized plastic. At 3.3 ounces, it's a featherweight compared to the Pre, iPhone and most BlackBerry phones - the Pre and [iPhone](#) each tip the scales at 4.8 ounces. The Pixi includes 8 gigabytes of storage for photos, music and videos.

The Pixi's display is an elfin version of its older brother's. Like the Pre, it has Palm's easy-to-navigate WebOS software, which organizes your open applications like little playing cards that stretch across the screen, waiting for you to tap on them to bring them to the foreground. (You use an upward finger flick to dismiss them.)

A notable WebOS feature has been its ability to aggregate your contacts and calendar entries from such services as [Facebook](#) and Google. The Pixi takes things a little further by letting you include your contacts from Yahoo and business-networking site LinkedIn, too.

There's also a Facebook application on the handset so you can start updating your status and checking up on your friends right away.

Numerous issues make the Pixi hard to use, though. The keyboard is cute, but the keys are so tiny that I often had to type with my fingernails. I'm guessing this would be problematic for any people who keep their nails trimmed. The screen also felt too small, as I often found myself squinting at e-mails and enlarging Web pages so much that I had to constantly scroll just to read a block of text.

An even bigger problem was the Pixi's sluggishness. Even if I had just

one or two programs running, the phone regularly stuttered or took a long time to load applications.

While typing a status update in the [Facebook](#) app, for example, I might not see the words I had written for a few seconds. Many times I opened the camera while a few other applications were open and the Pixi stalled for a while before finally letting me take photos. And when I turned the phone to the side while surfing YouTube, the images on the screen took a while to follow.

Sometimes, it was hard to tell whether it was the Pixi or Sprint's network that was the issue, like when it took a long time to load busy, graphic-heavy Web pages like The New York Times' home page.

On the Pre, you can get around spotty or no network coverage by using Wi-Fi, if it's available. Sadly, the Pixi has no Wi-Fi, so if you're in an area with subpar data coverage - or no coverage at all - you're sunk. Several times the handset seemed unwilling to download an application for updating my feed on Twitter.

Like the Pre, the Pixi takes photos very quickly once you push the button (many cell phone cameras have a lag that means subjects' smiles turn to grimaces by the time the shutter snaps.) The Pixi's 2-megapixel camera is not as good as the 3-megapixel one on the Pre, and shots often seemed darker than those I've taken with the Pre.

Battery life was not amazing. I got about 10 1/2 hours of casual use out of the Pixi, and if I were doing lots of texting and talking the Pixi probably would not have made it through a full day.

If you're a first-time smart phone buyer who's big on style and text messaging, the Pixi may be a good fit. Beyond that, however, its charm quickly wears off.

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