

Review: HTC's Evo 4G is a very good 3G phone

May 20 2010, By JESSICA MINTZ , AP Technology Writer



In this product image provided by Sprint, the Sprint HTC EVO 4G mobile phone is displayed. (AP Photo/Sprint) NO SALES

(AP) -- HTC's Evo 4G phone is fast, powerful and fun to use - as long as your heart isn't set on tapping into the speedier new network it was designed for.

The Evo 4G, \$199 with a two-year contract and rebate, is the first smart phone made for Sprint's fourth-generation wireless network, which is

available in Seattle and a few dozen other cities today. But the vast majority of the time, the phone was connected to the current-generation 3G network. It turns out there are gaps in the coverage area, and my house and my office are both in that 4G-free zone.

That means I usually couldn't surf the Web and chat on the phone at the same time. It also wouldn't let me upload a large video file over 3G, waiting instead to be connected to a Wi-Fi network. The upload did work from my car once I got a 4G signal a few blocks from home.

Another disappointment was that the video-chat feature wasn't set up on the review unit from Sprint. I used the program, called Qik, to stream live video to a website, which seemed to work well over 3G without too much of a lag. Sprint says once the feature is working on the phones, I would have been able to chat with my parents, say, after they downloaded a desktop version of Qik.

All that said, I wouldn't pass on the Evo 4G completely.

It's a very good [3G phone](#). It's also a really big 3G phone, almost too big to fit in the back pocket of my jeans comfortably. It has a massive 4.3-inch screen, noticeably larger than the iPhone's 3.5-inch screen and the 3.7-inch screen on the Droid Incredible, which [HTC](#) recently launched through [Verizon Wireless](#).

Despite its size, the phone is sleek, with few buttons along the sides and touch-sensitive navigation icons instead of physical buttons on the face.

When I first turned the Evo 4G on, I was struck by how bright and crisp all the icons looked. To get the lay of the land, I swiped back and forth between the phone's seven home screens. Like the Incredible, the Evo 4G is based on Google Inc.'s Android 2.1 software, with HTC's own user interface called Sense layered on top. The screens were already filled

with shortcuts to various programs, but every icon or small "widget" program can be moved or removed from the display entirely.

Before I continue, a confession: I still use a basic, "feature" cell phone. Every time I'm about to commit to a smart phone, out comes one with better hardware or upgraded software. So it's possible the bond I formed with the Evo 4G is merely puppy love, and I'd feel this way about any state-of-the-art smart phone.

Unlike getting a new feature phone, where the excitement was postponed while I punched in all my friends' phone numbers, making the Evo 4G mine was as simple as typing in my Gmail address and password. Within seconds, my inbox, address book and calendar were filled with my own data.

I used Google's [Android](#) market to download applications for such diversions as instant messaging, taking Polaroid-esque photos and tracking my finances. The apps downloaded quickly in the background, while I continued browsing.

The Evo 4G only has an on-screen keyboard, which didn't result in as many typos as I had feared. Every time I pressed a key, the screen vibrated a little, giving me some physical feedback.

A few times, I used the built-in dictate feature instead of typing, which is mostly good for a laugh. Saying, "It's a sad coincidence" led the phone to suggest the word "Twitter." I tried to say "sad coincidence" much more clearly, and it came close, suggesting "bad coincidence."

Surfing the Web with the built-in browser was snappy, and when I zoomed in on an article I wanted to read, the text was extremely crisp. I was able to listen to music online and watch videos on YouTube without a hiccup, both made extra-fun by the cute built-in kickstand that

propped it up and freed the speaker on the back from getting muffled.

I couldn't watch Hulu videos because the built-in browser uses a lightweight version of the Flash animation technology. And another drawback - outdoors in the sun, I had to tilt or shield the screen to see.

It was really easy to transform the phone into a Wi-Fi hotspot and hook my colleague's iPad to it with just a few taps of the screen on either end. That service will cost \$30 extra per month.

Photos I took with the built-in 8-megapixel camera and shared online looked colorful and smooth on my screen, though ones using the zoom feature were pixelated. Still, up close the images were inferior to my point-and-shoot, even though that boasts a mere 7.1 megapixels. And, as with many other cell phone cameras, shutter lag was a problem when I was trying to snap a picture of my camera-shy dog.

I also tried recording high-definition video, but when I played it back on YouTube, it was a far cry from what I expect when I think HD.

I even made old-fashioned phone calls. On my end they sounded loud and perfect, but one person I called heard a loud background hum.

In the end, the biggest hassle was the battery, which often died after four to five hours of usage. Granted, I spent a lot of time taking pictures, using the video camera, checking e-mail and tinkering with the phone - more than I would after the honeymoon phase ended. Sprint says the phone can be used for six hours of talking, but doesn't specify battery life for "obsessive e-mail checking and apps use." The company also said I might have gotten more time had I turned off the 4G system when I was in 3G-only areas.

So, was it puppy love? Let's just say I'm going to wait a little bit longer

to see what comes out next.

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Citation: Review: HTC's Evo 4G is a very good 3G phone (2010, May 20) retrieved 22 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-05-htc-evo-4g-good-3g.html>

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