

Asahi Glass unveils super-strong smartphone cover

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A reporter tries to scratch the surface of a Dragontrail glass developed by Asahi Glass Co. with a key during a news conference in Tokyo Thursday, Jan. 20, 2011. Asahi Glass, Japan's largest glass maker, unveiled a super-tough, scratch resistant cover for gadgets that it says is six times stronger than conventional glass. The product represents Asahi's intensified ambitions to grab a chunk of the surging global market for smartphones and tablets. (AP Photo/Tomoko Hosaka)

Gorilla glass, meet Dragontrail. Asahi Glass Co., Japan's largest glass maker, on Thursday unveiled a super-tough, scratch resistant cover for gadgets that it says is six times stronger than conventional glass.

Called "Dragontrail," the product represents Asahi's intensified ambitions to grab a chunk of the surging global market for smartphones and tablets. All those devices need a durable sheath to protect what's inside from the bumps, nicks and falls that inevitably come with use.

The biggest player in the market now is Corning Inc., which makes the much-heralded "Gorilla" glass.

Gorilla, a similarly ultra-strong glass, is used by more than 20 major brands in 200 million-plus cell phones and mobile devices, according to the New York-based company. It's in Samsung's Galaxy smartphones and tablets, as well as Motorola's Droid phone and LG's X300 notebook.

It's been rumored to be used by Apple Inc., but neither company has confirmed the much-discussed mystery. Corning says not all customers want to be identified.

Gorilla has been a huge success for Corning since it picked up its first customer in 2008. It generated \$80 million in revenue in 2009, and soaring demand could boost sales to \$1 billion this year as the glass begins to migrate to high-end TVs.

So how does Dragontrail stack up against the Gorilla? Asahi Glass executives weren't saying, declining to make any direct comparisons with competitors.

Instead, the company says Dragontrail matches the best products currently available and describes Dragontrail as a "superior substitute to conventional cover material." It is multiple times stronger than soda-lime glass commonly used in windows, resists scratches and has a "beautiful, pristine" finish.

A brief test by The Associated Press resulted in the glass showing

virtually no damage after being scratched hard for several seconds with a key.

Asahi Glass hopes Dragontrail will generate global revenue of at least 30 billion yen (\$360 million) and about 30 percent market share next year.

The product is already in some devices, but the company said it could not reveal details about customers or when it signed its first deal.

President and Chief Executive Kazuhiko Ishimura called the new glass a "very important global strategic product."

"We aim for Dragontrail to serve as one of the foundations for growth for the Asahi Glass Group," he said at a news conference.

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