

Samsung's Droid Charge disappoints

June 23 2011, By Troy Wolverton



Samsung's Droid Charge is the latest high-end Android smartphone from Verizon. It carries a premium price - but it's not worth it.

The Charge is one of the first phones capable of accessing Verizon's new 4G network, joining the [HTC](#) Thunderbolt that I reviewed in April and the recently released LG Revolution. The three phones are fairly similar. They each have 1-gigahertz processors, large 4.3-inch touch screens and run Android 2.2, which is a recent, but not the latest, release of the operating system.

But the Charge stands out from the others because of its weight, [battery life](#) and [storage capacity](#). The device weighs just 4 ounces, which makes it lighter than Apple's iPhone 4G despite having a much larger screen. It feels light in the hand, too, if a bit bulky thanks to its oversize screen.

Samsung promises about 11 hours of use out of the Charge between charges, which dwarfs the promised battery life of the iPhone or the Charge's rival 4G devices. I didn't get anywhere near that much use out of the Charge. But unlike the Thunderbolt, which always seemed to be out of juice when I wanted to use it, the Charge usually endured a good day of off-and-on use without needing to be recharged.

Another nice thing about the Charge compared with the Revolution or the Thunderbolt is that it includes a 32-gigabyte [SD card](#). That's comparable to the storage built into the similarly priced, top-of-the-line iPhone and four times as much as other 4G Verizon devices. It will give you ample room to store apps, music or even movies.

One way Android phone makers have tried to distinguish themselves is by offering a distinct interface in the form of customized buttons, home screens or [widgets](#). The Charge has a row of virtual buttons you see when you pull down its notifications window. The buttons allow you to instantly turn on or off items such as the Charge's [Wi-Fi](#) antenna or its ability to access data over the cellphone network.

This is a great feature and one I wish other phone makers, including Apple, would copy. Locating such buttons in the notification window makes them much easier to find than on other phones, where you have to comb through settings menus or flip through numerous home screens to find the right widget.

But the Charge has some notable shortcomings. In my testing, applications - particularly email and Google Voice - crashed repeatedly.

The phone's hotspot feature - which allows computers and other devices to connect to the Internet via a wireless connection to the Charge - also stopped working for a while, for unknown reasons. I wouldd try to launch it, and it just wouldn't start up.

Verizon recently pushed out a new software update for the Charge that seems to have addressed the hotspot problem and that was supposed to have squashed other bugs. In my early testing of the Charge post-update, I didn't encounter another crash.

The Charge also felt sluggish at times, not a good thing for a brand-new phone. Part of that has to do with Verizon's network. Yes, Web pages load super-quickly over 4G. But most places in the country, including areas within and surrounding the San Francisco Bay Area, don't have 4G. In those areas, you get thrown back onto Verizon's 3G network, which feels pitifully slow in comparison.

But the Charge can feel slow even when connected to the 4G network. I noticed a slight lag when flipping through its home screens or launching applications - and a considerable lag after rebooting the device, something I did frequently on a recent trip to conserve power. While you can get past the initial screen, it will take you a while to do anything else, such as see your home-screen widgets or launch applications.

The Charge has other shortcomings. Its plastic case feels cheap and isn't very durable. The back of my review device was scratched after only a couple of weeks of use. It also comes loaded with plenty of "crapware" - preinstalled applications that you may not want, but can't uninstall. For example, Verizon installed its VZ Navigator app on the Charge, which requires a \$10 monthly subscription to use, even though the Charge already includes a similar, but free, turn-by-turn navigation program that's built into Google Maps.

And the Charge suffers from a general Android problem: As far along as Android has come in the past year or so, it still lacks polish compared with the iPhone. Things that take one step on the iPhone - such as returning a missed call or composing an email or scrolling up a Web page - often require two or more steps on an Android device. If you're accustomed to using an iPhone, as I am, those extra steps seem both inefficient and unintuitive and make the device less fun to use.

Heck, even turning on the Charge can be a frustrating experience, because the only way to do it is by pushing a small, narrow button on the side of the device.

Overall, the Droid Charge left me feeling a bit flat. It's not a bad Android device, but it's not the best. And it's still not an [iPhone](#) - and shouldn't be priced like one.

SAMSUNG [DROID](#) CHARGE SMARTPHONE:

-Likes: Lightweight; large, bright screen; good battery life; large flash storage card included

-Dislikes: Case feels cheap and bulky; buggy; feels sluggish; too much, unnecessary pre-loaded software; Android software still lacks polish; runs older version of Android

-Specs: 1-gigahertz processor; 32-gigabyte SD card; 8-megapixel camera; 4.3-inch OLED screen

-How much: \$300 with a two-year voice and data contract

-Web: vzw.com

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