

A look at the new HTC Sensation 4G smartphone

August 17 2011, By Troy Wolverton



If you're shopping for an Android smartphone and you're not wedded to AT&T or Verizon, it's hard to beat the new HTC Sensation 4G.

I've long been a fan of HTC's line of Android phones. Most have been

slender, lightweight, speedy and - for Android phones, which aren't always intuitive - easy to use. The Sensation, which is offered by T-Mobile, is no exception.

Like many of the latest Android phones, the Sensation has a large display, 4.3 inches diagonal. But unlike many of the first large-screen smartphones, the gadget doesn't feel oversized.

At 5.2 ounces, the Sensation is only slightly heavier than Apple's lightweight iPhone 4. The HTC phone is about 2 millimeters thicker than the iPhone 4, but thanks to the Sensation's rounded back, it's hard to notice the difference. Measurements aside, the Sensation feels better in the hand than its large-screen predecessors.

It's also fun to use, in part because it's quick and responsive.

HTC has packed the Sensation with a speedy new dual-core processor from Qualcomm. Unlike other dual-core Android devices I've tested, the Sensation seemed to benefit from its enhanced processing power. The device launches and switches between applications quickly. And the animations it uses when you scroll through app icons or move from one home page to another are generally smooth, not herky-jerky.

On top of the fast processor, the Sensation is one of a growing number of phones that can connect to T-Mobile's new high-speed data network.

T-Mobile is the smallest and probably most overlooked of the four major U.S. wireless carriers. Its network coverage nationally is not as extensive as Verizon's or AT&T's, and its lineup of devices is often less compelling than those of the bigger carriers.

But if you've dismissed T-Mobile for these reasons, it deserves another look. Its service plans tend to be less expensive than those of its rivals,

and its network is well-ranked in several regions.

What's more, its new network is quite fast. At my desk, I saw download speeds of up to 8 megabits per second and upload speeds of up to more than 2 megabits per second in spot tests. That's not as fast as what you might see on the new 4G phones from Verizon, but it's significantly faster than what you'll generally see on AT&T or Sprint. What it means is that Web pages, maps and other data load quickly, with few noticeable delays.

The other things to like about the Sensation are the features and apps that HTC has included. I've always liked the Sense interface that HTC has built to run on top of Android. I find it an accessible way to navigate the phone and find applications.

The latest version of Sense depicts the device's multiple home screens as faces on a virtual carousel. You can access any one of them by spinning the carousel to the left or right or by holding down the home button to see thumbnails of all of them at once.

I also liked the collection of new features HTC has added to the notifications area. Within the notification bar you can now find icons for the five applications you've used most recently, and you can switch to any of those apps by just tapping on its icon. Additionally, the Sensation has a "quick settings" area within notifications that allows you to turn on and off such things as the device's Wi-Fi or Bluetooth antennas without having to dig deep into its full settings menu.

It's been traditionally much more difficult to obtain or load movies, music and the like on to Android devices, compared with the iPhone. But that's starting to change. With the Sensation, you'll find an app called HTC Watch that allows you to rent or buy many of the latest Hollywood movies and download them directly to the phone. You won't find a huge

selection, but it's not bad.

You can also download music directly to the device from a built-in music store app or from Amazon.com's MP3 store.

The Sensation isn't perfect. Its biggest shortcoming is that it comes with only an 8-gigabyte flash memory card for storage. That doesn't leave you a lot of space for movies, music or apps. But it's a problem that can be easily corrected; for about \$50 online, you can find a 32-gigabyte microSD card to replace the included one.

As much as I like the Sensation, I still prefer the iPhone 4 and would definitely recommend the latter over the Sensation to new smartphone users. The iPhone 4 remains a more accessible and easier-to-use device than any of its Android rivals, including the Sensation. And while there is a growing number of apps you can find for Android, there still are many that only exist on the iPhone.

That said, the Sensation just may be the best Android phone you can buy right now.

[HTC SENSATION 4G SMARTPHONE:](#)

-Likes: Thin, lightweight design; easy-to-use interface; quick processor and speedy data connection; new multimedia apps

-Dislikes: Included memory card provides little storage space

-Specs: Dual-core 1.2GHz processor; 4.3-inch display; VGA front- and 8-megapixel rear-facing cameras; 8GB microSD storage card

-How much: \$200 with two-year contract, after mail-in rebate

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