

Droid Razr Maxx's longevity tops Galaxy Note's stylus

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With so many Android smartphones on the market these days, many sporting quite similar screen sizes and underlying technical specs, manufacturers are having to find new ways to differentiate their products.

Two of the [latest gadgets](#) are cases in point. On paper, the Samsung Galaxy Note and the [Motorola Droid](#) Razr Maxx have very similar specs. But the two phones are quite distinct, thanks to some unusual features.

The Galaxy Note, available through AT&T, is Samsung's attempt to turn a [smartphone](#) into a digital notepad, replete with not only a jumbo 5.3-inch screen, but also a stylus and software that can translate handwritten notes into text.

The Droid Razr Maxx, available through Verizon Wireless, has a more subtle distinction - a battery that the company says will allow users to talk for up to 21 { hours. That's 70 percent longer than the promised talk time on the original Droid Razr, which Motorola released just three months ago and for which the new gadget is a dead ringer.

It's exciting to see smartphone manufacturers exploring new innovations. But in this case, I'd take the subtle over the splashy.

I've not been a fan of the trend toward bigger screens in smartphones. While the extra viewing space is nice, a big-screen device is harder to hold, talk on or fit in your pocket. The Galaxy Note takes this trend to the extreme. It's like the Hummer of smartphones. I felt ridiculous holding this clumsy device up to my ear and found it nearly impossible to use with one hand.

The point of the large screen is to enable the device to behave like a tablet - good for watching movies and composing documents, but in a more portable, than a regular, tablet.

The Galaxy Note's display is bright and crisp, great for viewing videos or reading e-books.

Samsung has included a few applications and built-in features for the

device's stylus. You can take handwritten notes in S Memo, finely crop or enhance photos in the device's gallery and direct a ball to its goal by drawing and erasing lines in "Crayon Physics." The game and photo enhancement work OK.

But memo-taking - one of the express purposes of the Galaxy Note - was its most disappointing aspect.

As a reporter, I still often resort to a pen and paper when interviewing subjects or taking notes at conferences. I'd love to be able to replace that antiquated system with a digital notepad that would recognize my handwriting and allow me to take fully searchable notes.

The Galaxy Note would seem to fit the bill. It's about the size of one of my notebooks, and the S Memo is a virtual notepad that will translate handwriting to text.

But the handwriting recognition isn't automatic; instead, you have to tell the program to translate each page of notes one at a time. And the program does an awful job of handwriting recognition. When I wrote in cursive, it recognized about one out of every 10 words.

It did better when I carefully printed my notes, but that's a much more time-consuming method. It's much quicker to use the virtual keyboard.

The Galaxy Note had one other big flaw: Its jumbo screen rapidly sucks the juice out of its battery. Samsung says you'll get 10 hours of talk time and 10 days of standby time on the device. But that seems optimistic. Even with moderate use surfing the Web, watching movies and checking email, the device barely lasted a day on a charge.

Extra-long battery life is the key feature of the Droid Razr Maxx. Its predecessor, the Droid Razr, had an all-too-short battery life that

undermined its appealingly sleek, ultrathin design.

Motorola put a much bigger battery into the Droid Razr Maxx. Its capacity is even greater than the one in the Galaxy Note, which is a significantly larger device. The bigger battery makes the Razr Maxx slightly thicker than the original Droid Razr, but you probably won't notice. Compared with just about any other smartphone on the market, it still feels superthin, making its 4.3-inch screen easier to hold and pocket.

And the battery does a great job. Other reviewers have confirmed Motorola's talk-time figure. In my own tests, the Droid Razr Maxx lasted more than 24 hours with off-and-on use, including several hours using its battery-draining mobile hotspot feature and several more watching streaming videos, surfing the Web and checking email, all without tweaking any settings to maximize the battery's life.

The Droid Razr Maxx's preinstalled programs and interface are generally not exciting. But it does have one neat program called "Smart Actions" that allows users to configure the device to do certain tasks automatically.

With Smart Actions, you can have the Droid Razr Maxx turn off its Bluetooth antenna at night or turn on its map program when you get in your car. Not everyone will have the patience to set up the rules that automate these actions. But as someone who has spent a lot of time manually reconfiguring phones for different settings, I've wanted a program like this for years.

That program and the great battery life are why I prefer the Droid Razr Maxx to the Galaxy Note. A longer battery life isn't as exciting as a phone that purports to act like a notebook, but in this case it's a lot more satisfying.

SAMSUNG GALAXY NOTE:

- Likes: Beautiful, sharp, high-resolution display; user-friendly, customized Android interface; sophisticated built-in photo-editing program, superfast 4G connection where available
- Dislikes: Poor handwriting recognition; subpar battery life; few stylus-oriented programs; extra-jumbo size
- Specs: Dual-core 1.5GHz processor, 5.3-inch screen, 8-megapixel rear-facing camera, 16 gigabytes onboard storage
- Price: \$300 with a two-year contract with AT&T
- Web: [samsung](http://samsung.com).com or wireless.att.com

MOTOROLA DROID RAZR MAXX:

- Likes: Super-long [battery life](#); Smart Actions app that automatically adjusts settings depending on time or location; ultrathin design
- Dislikes: Unremarkable pre-loaded software and Android interface
- Specs: Dual-core 1.2GHz processor, 4.3-inch screen, 8-megapixel rear-facing camera, 32 gigabytes of storage
- Price: \$300 with two-year Verizon contract
- Web: motorola.com or vzw.com

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