

# Review: Samsung Galaxy Note a too-big phone, too-small tablet

March 3 2012, By Nathan Olivarez-Giles

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When Samsung unveiled the Galaxy Note in September, the South Korean tech giant pitched the Note as a gadget that offers the best of a smartphone and a tablet in one groundbreaking new category of device.

Months later, and with more than 1 million Notes shipped in other countries, I have to disagree with Samsung's premise that the Note is something entirely new or needed.

With a 5.3-inch [touch screen](#), the Note's size does in fact fit between many tablets and smartphones. But make no mistake, the Note is a phone. A really big phone. Too big.

The supposed gap between smartphones and tablets that [Samsung](#) says the Note is filling? I think it's a gap that doesn't need to be filled.

In my time using the Galaxy Note, I never felt as though this one device replaced my smaller smartphones or my use of tablets. To put it simply, the Note is too big to be a practical phone and too small to be a useful tablet.

I should be able to use my [smartphone](#) with one hand while walking around the office or at home or anywhere else. Using the Note with one hand is tough because my thumb couldn't reach diagonally across the screen. When I did use the Note with one hand, I often felt like I was close to dropping it, and nobody wants to worry about dropping a phone.

I found the Note clumsily oversized, but there is no denying that it's an impressive piece of hardware.

Samsung knows how to make good products, and the Note is a well-built gadget, fitting in nicely with the quality that I've enjoyed in using other products in the company's Galaxy lineup, such as the Galaxy S II and Galaxy Nexus (my two favorite Android phones at the moment) and all but the first-generation of Galaxy Tab tablets.

A look at the hardware specs on the Note reveals that, in many ways, the Note is an overgrown version of the S II.

The S II is offered with smaller, but still huge, touch screens of either 4.3 inches or 4.5 inches. The Nexus has a 4.65-inch screen, but that massive display is paired with a thinner bezel to prevent the phone from

feeling needlessly big.

Like the S II and Nexus, the Note's display uses Samsung's Super AMOLED technology, and it looks gorgeous. One plus with the Note's 5.3-inch screen is that the display works out beautifully for watching HD-quality movies or for reading e-books.

The Note's screen features a 1280x800 pixel resolution, and websites and apps look great, though the colors felt a bit oversaturated, a bit too poppy and not quite true to life. Black levels were deep and contrasted wonderfully with the bright colors the Note produces. Samsung really is producing some of the nicest smartphone displays on the market.

Inside, the Note has a 1.5-gigahertz dual core processor, up from the 1.2-gigahertz CPUs found in the S II and Nexus. All three devices include 1 gigabyte of RAM. With such a speedy processor and ideal amount of RAM powering the Note, I saw few noticeable performance lags in Samsung's TouchWiz version of Google's Android Gingerbread operating system.

I was disappointed that the Note runs on Gingerbread and not the newer Android Ice Cream Sandwich, but Samsung has said an update to the new OS will arrive by the end of March.

The Note, like the S II and the Nexus, has an 8-megapixel/1080p camera with a single LED flash in back and a 2-megapixel front-facing camera for video chatting or photos. The camera was good, but it lacked the sharpness I've found in photos taken on Apple's iPhone 4S and Motorola's Droid Razr and Droid Razr Maxx - which also offer 8-megapixel shooters.

Like the S II, the Note features 16 gigabytes of built-in storage and a microSD card slot that can accommodate a card of up to 32 gigabytes of

added storage.

A major feature Samsung is touting with the Note, which many other smartphones don't have, is a stylus. But although Samsung has pitched the stylus - or S Pen, as they like to call it - as a convenience, it feels more like a novelty. A stylus isn't an altogether bad idea, but the Note's display didn't respond consistently to the S Pen.

When drawing or writing in Samsung's included S Memo app, I noticed that, on multiple occasions, not every stroke of the S Pen was captured. Usually, in writing or drawing, the S Pen worked as advertised, but the inconsistency was enough to make me feel that Samsung still had some bugs to work out here.

The S Pen can also be used to take screenshots, which is a welcome trick considering Android Gingerbread doesn't have this feature built-in. But screenshots were inconsistent also, with the S Pen only working about half of the time. The problem might be that a button on the S Pen has to be pressed as the stylus hits the screen.

I used two Galaxy Notes during my testing, and I had the same problem with both units. Samsung needs to polish things a bit and at the price the Note is fetching: I don't want to feel like such a major feature is half-baked.

The price, by the way, is \$299.99 on a 2-year contract through AT&T. I don't normally like a \$300 price point for a phone with 16 gigabytes of storage, but the large screen and the S Pen (if it worked better) might justify the cost.

Given how nice the hardware is, I would likely be able to get over the price of the Note, but what I can't get over is the size. It's too big to use enjoyably. The Note was awkward to hold to my ear when making a

phone call, though calls came in clear on AT&T's 4G LTE network. And despite being such a thin phone, the Note was still annoyingly large in the front and back pockets of my jeans.

All of the things I found myself liking about the Note are available in Samsung's S II and [Nexus](#), but I prefer those devices because they're small enough to be much more easily portable.

Because of the Note's size, some have called it a "tablone" and a "phoblet." No matter what you call the Note, it's a gadget I'm happy to live without.

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