

Review: Huawei's Mate2 phone good at \$299

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This undated product image provided by Huawei shows the Ascend Mate 2. (AP Photo/Huawei)

Mention Huawei in the U.S., and you're likely to get a blank look. Either that person has never heard of the Chinese phone maker or has heard something about security concerns raised by lawmakers in Washington.

Huawei Technologies Co. believes it can overcome all that as it makes a

bigger push in the U.S. and tries to build on its successes elsewhere. While Apple and Samsung dominate the worldwide smartphone market with a combined market share of 46 percent, Huawei has a slight lead among the rest, with about 5 percent, according to research firm IDC.

The Ascend Mate2 4G is a mid-range Android phone touted as an affordable alternative to such high-end phones as Apple's iPhone 5s and Samsung's Galaxy S5, both of which retail for about \$650 without a contract. The Mate2 will go for \$299 and will be sold directly by Huawei. It will work on AT&T's and T-Mobile's networks, but not on Verizon or Sprint.

You won't get all the features found in the iPhone or the S5, but the Mate2 does well on the basics, based on about a week of testing. Furthermore, it works with 4G cellular networks, while many cheaper devices are compatible only with the slower 3G networks.

Huawei will start taking orders on Thursday, with phones starting to ship within the week.

— **NICHE MARKET:** The phone is huge, with a screen measuring 6.1 inches diagonally. I prefer something that fits more easily in my hand and my pocket. The company says it's not for everyone. Rather, it's targeting a few types of customers, such as those who watch a lot of video and those who need a big screen for heavy-duty email and other business functions.

— **STANDING OUT:** A big phone has room for a big battery, and the 3,900 milliamp-hour battery in the Mate2 is among the biggest. By comparison, Samsung's 5.7-inch Galaxy Note 3 phone is at 3,200 milliamp-hours. I streamed nearly 16 hours of video from Hulu with the Mate2 at half brightness, compared with about 10.5 hours on the Note 3.

The big battery can also be used to charge other devices when you don't have a wall outlet. A charging cord is included for the first 3,000 customers; prices for latecomers haven't been announced. It works with Android and other devices with a Micro-USB port. You'll need an adapter for the iPhone.

The Mate2 also makes it easier to fit large groups into selfies. Software stitches together three shots, much like panoramic features found in many phones. The phone guides you on how to position the camera.

— **CAMERA:** Photos taken with the 13-megapixel rear camera are average for a camera phone. The front camera, though, offers 5 megapixels, much more than the 2 megapixels or less found in most other phones. This means sharper selfies. It might help video conferencing, too.

— **DISPLAY:** The screen resolution is 1,280 pixels by 720 pixels, well below that of high-end Android phones. Picture quality is still acceptable, though the heavy video watchers that Huawei is targeting might want sharper images. I also found that the screen is dimmer than other phones. To get something comparable, I had to crank up the Mate2's brightness, reducing battery life for Hulu to about 12.5 hours.

— **SECURITY CONCERNS:** Critics have suggested that Huawei's telecommunications-networking equipment poses security risks because of the company's alleged links to the Chinese government. In 2012, a congressional panel warned Americans not to do business with Huawei. The Australian government also barred it from bidding on work for a national broadband network.

The company has denied the allegations. In an interview last week, Zhiqiang Xu, the president of Huawei Device USA, dismissed the concerns as noise raised by politicians. He said most consumers haven't

even heard of Huawei, so the real challenge for the U.S. subsidiary will be to get them to recognize the brand without a massive marketing budget.

— **STARTUP CHALLENGES:** Huawei is dealing directly with customers, and no U.S. phone carrier is subsidizing the phone. Xu said Huawei will also have to build a customer-service operation in the U.S. and set up servers to push out software updates. The phone will ship with an older version of Android, Jelly Bean.

And because Huawei isn't a household name, finding its website at GetHuawei.com could be a challenge. The company registered several domain names to cover potential misspellings.

— **THE BOTTOM LINE:** The Mate2 won't match a high-end phone, but it offers a lot for about half the price. That's particularly impressive for a [phone](#) of this size. It's not a good deal if you're already getting expensive phones at a subsidized price of \$200, but it's one to consider if you're looking to ditch contracts and subsidies.

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