

# Troy Wolverton: Samsung Galaxy S6 outshines HTC One M9

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It's update time for Android smartphones, with top manufacturers releasing revised versions of their flagship devices. I've been testing two of the newly updated models - the Samsung Galaxy S6 and the HTC One m9 - and found one to be superior.

The most notable difference between the Galaxy S6 and last year's S5 is that Samsung has replaced the traditional plastic case with a metal frame

and a glass back. That new design feels much more solid and looks more elegant than previous models while remaining lightweight. But Galaxy S fans may rue the trade-offs: They can no longer swap out the battery, nor can they plug in an external memory card.

Samsung is also introducing a new version to the S series line - a model called the S6 Edge. In contrast to the standard S6, which comes with the usual flat screen in front, the Edge has a screen that's curved along its two long sides.

Users can configure the phone so that one of the curved areas - and only that part of the screen - displays the time at night, allowing them to use their phone as a kind of bedside alarm clock. The area can also display alerts that come in overnight, including text messages and email. And it can be used to show specially colored notifications when the phone receives calls or messages from users' favorite contacts.

The curved screen looks cool, but I found it to be more of a gimmick than a useful feature. It can be frustrating, too, leading to a lot of inadvertent button presses or tapping of links when you are holding the phone. The curved areas are touch-sensitive like the rest of the S6 Edge's screen, and the phone's metal frame is fairly thin, so it's hard to hold the device without your thumb pressing on the curved screen, particularly if you are trying to use it with just one hand.

In addition to refining the design of its S series, Samsung also focused on streamlining the software. In years past, the company crammed into the S series a bunch of features that were hard to find and use, and they worked poorly. This year, there are few standout new features, but a lot of refinements.

The fingerprint reader that Samsung introduced last year, for example, works loads better than it did in last year's model. It was flawless in my

testing, quickly recognizing my thumbprint. Similarly, the S6 sports a 16-megapixel camera just like last year's model, but it works great. The pictures I took with it were sharp, the colors seemed to true to life, and the camera performed well in low-light situations.

Samsung has also refined the interface on many of the apps, cleaning them up so that there are fewer icons and clutter on the screen. They generally look and work better.

But some of the phone's features are still half-baked. The S6 can display multiple apps at one time either by splitting the screen in half or by allowing the apps to run in windows. I found that when I displayed multiple apps, the phone's performance slowed down noticeably, and the text in each particular application became hard to read because it was too small.

In contrast to the S6, the design of HTC's One m9 is little changed from last year's model. That's OK with me; I've liked the look and feel of the One series since it debuted.

What's disappointing about the m9 is that HTC did away with one of the really cool features of last year's model. The m8 had two rear cameras, one of which was used to glean the distance of subjects from the device and to identify particular objects in a frame. That allowed users to do some cool tricks, like being able to easily select and cut out objects from one picture and paste them into another or having only one thing sharp in the picture while blurring out everything else.

HTC swapped out the dual-camera system for a single camera that is nominally more powerful in terms of the megapixels it can capture. But the new camera loses the ability to do some of cool tricks of last year's model. And it's just not a very good camera. Compared to pictures taken with the S6 or even my nearly-two-year-old iPhone 5S, the pictures

looked less sharp, the colors weren't as true, and the m9 performed worse in low light.



## HTC One M9

I found other new or updated features similarly unimpressive. The m9 has a home screen widget that is supposed to recommend applications based on users' location, displaying the ones they are most likely to use at home, at work or when they are out and about. I found the recommendations unhelpful, because they didn't really reflect my actual

usage.

Like last year's model, the m9 has a special home-screen area called BlinkFeed, a Flipboard-like widget that displays updates from your social networks and news sites. BlinkFeed is now supposed to show restaurant recommendations around meal times, depending on users' location. I couldn't get that feature to work, so I can't rate its recommendations.

Overall, when it comes to this year's flagship updates, Samsung's feels like a step forward, while HTC's seems like a step back.

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Troy's rating: 7.5 out of 10

What: Samsung Galaxy S6 smartphone

Likes: Metal frame and glass back feel more solid and refined than previous models' plastic cases; excellent camera; fingerprint reader works quickly and accurately; apps and interface less cluttered, more streamlined than previous versions.

Dislikes: No memory card slot; battery no longer removable; curved screen on Edge version leads to inadvertent taps and clicks; windowed multi-tasking works poorly.

Specs: 8-core processor; 5.1-inch, 2560 x 1440 pixel screen; 5-megapixel front and 16-megapixel rear cameras.

Price: \$600 for 32GB model, \$700 for 64GB, \$800 for 128GB; Edge version is additional \$100 at each storage size.

Web: [samsung.com](http://samsung.com)

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Troy's RATING

6.5 out of 10

What: HTC One m9 smartphone

Likes: Solid-feeling design; streamlined interface; ability to customize look-and-feel with new themes.

Dislikes: Camera took poor quality pictures and lacks some of the standout features of last year's model; new Home widget and other features don't work particularly well.

Specs: 8-core processor; 5-inch, 1920 x 1080 pixel screen; "ultra-pixel" front and 20-megapixel rear cameras; 32GB on-board storage.

Price: \$600

Web: [htc.com](http://htc.com)

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