

Review: Beyond size, what you get and give up with iPhone SE

March 24 2016, by Anick Jesdanun



From left, the iPhone 6S Plus, 6S and SE lie next to each other in a comparison photograph, Thursday, March 24, 2016, in New York. Apple's new 4-inch iPhone SE is a good choice at a good price for many people. You get the same speeds, graphics capabilities and rear camera as the iPhone 6S, but for \$250 less. (AP Photo/Julie Jacobson)

Unless you take a lot of selfies or need a bigger phone, Apple's new 4-inch iPhone SE is a good choice at a good price.

You get the same 12-megapixel rear camera that's in the much larger iPhone 6S, but for \$250 less, at about \$400. You also get the same speeds and [graphics capabilities](#).

Of course, you don't get everything. The SE isn't going to be right for everyone, especially power users. Now that Apple has started taking orders, with shipments due in a week, keep these differences in mind:

— Most noticeable is the front camera. The SE has an older 1.2-megapixel camera—not the 5 megapixel one in the 6S. But with software improvements, selfies taken with the SE came out better compared with the iPhone 5S it replaced. In addition, the SE's screen turns into a front-camera flash. That's more important than megapixels in darker settings.

— Though you get the same rear camera as the 6S, you don't get an image-stabilizing feature found in the jumbo iPhone 6S Plus. This won't matter to most people, though. I typically have to blow up shots and look real closely for differences. You get the same options for panorama shots, slow motion and high-resolution "4K" video in all three phones.



From bottom, the iPhone 6S Plus, 6S and SE lie stacked on one another in a comparison photograph, Thursday, March 24, 2016, in New York. Apple's new 4-inch iPhone SE is a good choice at a good price for many people. You get the same speeds, graphics capabilities and rear camera as the iPhone 6S, but for \$250 less. (AP Photo/Julie Jacobson)

— The SE lacks a barometer, which means fitness apps won't record stairs climbed. The SE also lacks 3D Touch, in which you can press on an icon hard and harder for shortcuts and other options. Including it would have made the phone thicker. You can still perform the same tasks, but might need an extra tap or two.

— The SE doesn't support "LTE Advanced" cellular technology, which can be twice as fast as regular LTE. The iPhone 6 doesn't either, and frankly, I didn't even notice when I got the 6S. There's one SE model for Sprint and another for AT&T, T-Mobile and Verizon. China has its own model, though both U.S. versions should still work there and elsewhere

abroad—data will just potentially be slower without LTE Advanced.

— The SE doesn't come in a version with 128 gigabytes of storage—just 16 GB for starters and 64 GB for \$100 more. Many high-power users will probably want a bigger screen anyway, but if that's not the case, splurge for 64 GB. Your phone will fill up quickly—especially as still images now come with three-second videos by default, doubling storage requirements.



In this Monday, March 21, 2016, file photo, members of the media and invited guests take a look at the new iPhone SE during an event at Apple headquarters in Cupertino, Calif. Unless you take a lot of selfies or need a bigger phone, Apple's new 4-inch iPhone SE is a good choice at a good price. (AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez, File)

Promised battery life for video and Web surfing is 13 hours—a few

hours better than the 6S. It helps that there's less screen to light up.

The SE largely retains the boxy feel of the 5S, so old cases will work, but you don't get a smoother feel from the larger phones' curved edges. On the other hand, the smaller size feels more comfortable, and had there been a curved design at that size, your phone might slip out of your hand more easily.

I ran 14 miles with the phone in my hand or pocket and forgot about it. Oh, I miss that size. But the screen now feels tiny for reading and typing, now that I'm used to a bigger one.



In this Monday, March 21, 2016, file photo, Greg Joswiak, vice president of iOS, iPad and iPhone product marketing, announces the new iPhone SE at Apple headquarters in Cupertino, Calif. Unless you take a lot of selfies or need a bigger phone, Apple's new 4-inch iPhone SE is a good choice at a good price. (AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez, File)

If you've been clinging on to your 5S because you don't want a larger iPhone, now is a good time to upgrade. A new wireless chip enables payments with Apple Pay. There's faster Wi-Fi, though not as fast as the 6S. You can also access the Siri voice assistant anytime hands-free, without pressing the home button.

Though your 5S might last a few more months, it's going to get tougher to run the latest software and apps. And the \$400 price is \$50 less than what the 5S sold for. If your 5S is in good condition, you can trade it in at an Apple store and get the SE for \$240, in 24 monthly installments.

Many Android makers have shunned 4-inch screens in premium phones. You're stuck with mid-range phones that lack high-end cameras and speeds. I had expected older technology in the iPhone SE, as Apple usually has 2-year-old hardware at this price. Instead, much of what's inside is just six months old—better than the iPhone 6 and 6 Plus.

Sure, there are trade-offs, but at least Apple didn't try to pressure people into larger models by skimping on what matters most.



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