

Review: Apple's iPhone 7 is best model yet, but some may wait for better

October 5 2016, by Jim Rossman, The Dallas Morning News



Credit: Apple

It's been an interesting iPhone release season.

Usually folks are pretty charged up about a new iPhone, but this year's iPhone 7 release brought a controversy about Apple's decision to kill the headphone jack.

I'm sure in a year or two, we'll all scratch our heads and realize it really wasn't that important after all.

Apple has a history of deciding when we've had enough of a technology like the floppy disk and optical drive.

It's usually ahead of the pack on these decisions, and once the offending feature has been cut from one product, expect it to disappear from subsequent product releases.

So, yes, the iPhone 7 does not have a headphone jack, but Apple is really trying to cushion the blow by including a set of earpods with a Lightning connector, and it's including a Lightning-to-3.5 mm headphone dongle. They both work well and sound just fine.

The Lightning-to-headphone-jack adapter is \$9 at the Apple store, and I think I'll be buying a few to keep on my favorite headphones. I'd rather keep them connected to my headphones than try to keep track of a loose dongle.

The iPhone 7 and the 7 Plus look just like last year's 6S models, and it shows how smartphone design isn't exactly evolving, mostly because the current designs are just fine.

Next year is the 10th anniversary of the iPhone, and the rumor is that Apple is holding off on a full-blown redo of the phone's design for the anniversary model. We shall see.

So if they don't really look different, what's new in the iPhone 7 models?

I've been carrying around a Verizon iPhone 7 for the last week, and I've been impressed.

FASTER

Everyone loves a faster phone, and every iPhone has been faster than the one before it, so the iPhone 7 is twice as fast as the iPhone 6, which is great if you have an iPhone 5 or 6.

I carry a 6S, and the 7 certainly felt fast, but once you get to a certain point, speed increases are just not as noticeable.

The 7 uses a CPU called the A10 Fusion, which is tuned to provide up to two hours more battery life over last year's models. More battery life is always good.

Apple says the 7's graphics performance is three times as fast as the iPhone 6's.

BETTER CAMERAS

The iPhone 7 and 7 Plus have much better cameras than any previous iPhone, and the difference is startling.

The iPhone 7 has a single-lens camera with an aperture of $f/1.8$, which is wide enough to bring out the best in low light.

Photographing a darkened room with the 7 and a 6S shows just how much better the 7's new lens and sensor work together. The 7's lens allows 50 percent more light onto the sensor.

The 7 uses a 12-megapixel sensor with optical image stabilization and a new feature, wide color capture, for more accurate colors.

The camera's wide lens also helps videos look better. The 7 can shoot 4K video that looks fantastic.

The selfie camera captures 7-megapixel images with wide color capture.

TWO IS BETTER THAN ONE

Apple decided to reward buyers of the iPhone 7 Plus with a two-lens camera that rivals almost every point-and-shoot camera I've used.

The wide-angle lens from the iPhone 7 is paired with a telephoto lens. They act as one when you're taking pictures.

The iPhone 7 Plus lenses provide users a 2x optical zoom. The phone will automatically switch between the two lenses to capture the best image.

The lenses also work together to provide up to a 10x digital zoom.

During the phone's introduction, Apple showed off a shallow depth-of-field feature of the 7 Plus that blurs the background of portraits. The feature will be added soon with a software update.

Both iPhone 7 models have a new quad-LED True Tone flash to help flash photos look more like natural light.

BETTER DISPLAY

The iPhone 7 models have displays with wide color ranges to deliver more true-to-life colors.

The 7 has a 4.7-inch LED with 3D Touch and a resolution of 1334 x 750 pixels, while the 7 Plus has a 5.5-inch 3D Touch display with a

resolution of 1920 x 1080 pixels.

Apple says the displays are 25 percent brighter than last year's phones.

On the display is the familiar home button with Touch ID sensor, but the home button on the 7 is not a mechanical button. It is a touch button that doesn't physically move, but when you touch it, you'll feel a small vibration that feels like you're pushing a button.

AUDIO

Apple beefed up the speaker system on the iPhone 7 models, hoping we'll use them more for playing our music out loud. The sound system has been overhauled to be twice as loud as the 6S'.

There are now two speakers - one in the bottom of the phone near the Lightning port and one on the front where you'd put your ear for a phone call.

The music I played through the 7 was loud enough, but such small speakers are not going to knock your socks off. The iPhone does continue to have an outstanding speakerphone.

WATER RESISTANCE

Last year several customers made videos showing customers dunking their iPhone 6S phones. The phones on the videos still worked, but I'm sure the moisture sensors were tripped and the warranty voided.

This year Apple is touting the water resistance of the iPhone 7 models.

The phones are IP67 rated, which means they are dustproof and water-resistant, capable of surviving a dunk of up to 3 feet for up to 30

minutes.

So your iPhone 7 and 7 Plus can survive an accidental dip in the pool, but don't take it swimming.

LTE IMPROVEMENTS

Apple has upgraded the cellular radios in the iPhone 7s. They now can transfer data at 450 megabits per second, which is three times as fast as the iPhone 6 and twice as fast as the 6S.

They've included support for 25 LTE bands and even opened up the phone app to allow third-party calling apps like WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger and others to be answered like a regular phone call.

PRICING AND STORAGE

The iPhone 7 comes in three configurations - 32-gigabyte for \$649, 128GB for \$749 and 256GB for \$849.

The 7 Plus has the same storage options for \$769, \$869 and \$969.

The phones come in silver, gold, rose gold and two new black phones - black (a matte black) and jet black (a shiny black). Space gray has been retired.

The iPhone 7 models are available wherever you buy your phones, including all four major carriers and major retailers as well as Apple stores.

The iPhone 7 and 7 Plus models are in short supply. Apple should have better inventory in a few weeks. Your best bet might be to order online from Apple.

CONCLUSIONS

After a year of carrying my iPhone 6S, the iPhone 7 felt like a well-worn shoe. I was comfortable from the beginning.

I was completely impressed by the new camera system. From the first photo, I was quite aware of how much better the 7 handled low light. As a former news photographer, I'm thrilled with how Apple is advancing the cameras in the iPhone.

I didn't find the lack of a headphone jack to be troublesome, but I can see where some might be upset.

Better battery life and water resistance are welcome additions.

I'd really like a dual-lens camera.

The iPhone 7 and 7 Plus are great upgrades if you have an iPhone 6 or 5, but I'm an iPhone 6S owner who is going to wait.

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iPhone 7

Pros: Game-changing camera, more storage, water resistance

Cons: That elusive [headphone jack](#)

Bottom line: Best iPhone yet

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