Review: AT&T Samsung Galaxy S II

October 27 2011, By Matthew Fortner

Android is on fire, and Samsung is stoking the flames with the Galaxy S II. It's the fastest selling Android device with 10 million units sold worldwide. Is the Galaxy S II the best current Android phone? Maybe. AT&T Wireless sent us theirs to try out.

Android fans may have the forthcoming Motorola Droid RAZR and

Samsung Galaxy Nexus in their eyes. No doubt, they promise to be nice devices when they arrive, but I'm with BGR's Zach Epstein, who says, "Unlike product cycles in the past, however, these new flagship phones were hardly a quantum leap past the current crop of Android-powered smartphones. In fact, the cycle of buyer's remorse may very well have just been broken."

It has one of the best displays available, and there are 4.27 inches of it. The screen, protected by Gorilla Glass with a fingerprint-resistant coating, is vibrant with sharp detail, and is visible even in sunlight.

Yes it is encased in plastic, but don't be deterred. It is attractive and apparently durable. Check out this drop test:

This also makes it pleasantly light. Despite having a larger screen and larger dimensions than my iPhone 4S, the Galaxy S II is lighter. Smartphone ergonomics can be subjective, but I felt more confident handling the Samsung. This surprised me since I thought the iPhone's smaller size would give it a handling edge.

Users among those who actually make calls will appreciate the good and distortion-free call quality. Those moving from 3G will notice data transfer speeds over AT&T's HSPA+ network to be consistently faster, but not as fast as LTE.

There has been a lot of talk about smartphone cameras lately.

This new Galaxy S has an 8-megapixel back-illuminated sensor camera aided by a single-LED flash. It can record 1080p video at 30 frames per second. There is also a fixed focus front-facing 2-megapixel camera that can also record VGA video at 640x480.

There a have been a number of image comparisons online. Some give

the edge to Samsung, and some to Apple. I found both to be capable with distinctly different characteristics that will appeal to different users. The images from the iPhone were warmer and had more contrast at times, but the Samsung's appear to be more saturated in some cases. To be honest, side-by-side shooting with these was like two heavyweights just trading punches. No camera is yet perfect, but both here are excellent. The difference won't matter to most.

Looking for camera control? The GSII doesn't offer aperture or shutter speed control, but you can adjust white balance, ISO, metering type, exposure value, focus mode, and from among various scene modes.

There are a number of other features Samsung provides that are pretty cool.

With Samsung's PC application Kies Air you access call logs, videos, photos, bookmarks, IMs and send SMS messages from the PC as long as it's connected to the same network.

In addition to allowing up to seven home screens, Samsung's TouchWiz interface performs some neat tricks. By tilting the phone you can zoom in and out of a Web page and view an email preview. Swype's amazing finger dragging keyboard is an option. It can handle DLNA media streaming.

The device has 16 GB of storage built-in. If you need more, beneath the battery cover is a 32 GB capable microSd slot.

The bottom line comes down to user preferences, but if you are considering a top-shelf Android smartphone, the Samsung Galaxy S II is an obvious device to start with. The screen and camera are excellent. As always, newer devices may loom over the horizon, but none that should invoke buyer's remorse.

- $199.99 with a two-year contract

- 1.2 GHz dual-core processor and 1 GB GB of RAM

- 4.27-inch 800x480 resolution and Super AMOLED Plus touch screen

- 16 GB internal storage, 32 GB microSD card slot

- Google Android Gingerbread 2.3.4

- 8 megapixel auto-focus rear camera supporting 1080p video recording

- Front-facing camera for video chat over 4G HSPA+, 3G or Wi-Fi networks

- 4.93 inches x 2.6 inches x 0.44 inches and 4.09 ounces

- HSPA+ 21 Mbps

- Wi-Fi, micro USB, BlueTooth 3.0, NFC

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