

Review: The iPhone 7 is just fine, even if it doesn't wow

13 September 2016, by Anick Jesdanun



got louder speakers, a brighter screen and, in the larger 7 Plus, a second camera lens—a low-powered but useful zoom. Add to that a sharper 12 megapixel camera introduced with the 6S.

All iPhone 7 models come with twice the storage as the comparable 6S, at mostly the same price. That's "mostly" because the \$769 starting price for the larger iPhone 7 Plus is \$20 more than comparable past models. The regular iPhone 7 stays at \$649. Both entry-level phones now have 32 gigabytes rather than 16.

In this Sept. 7, 2016, file photo, Phil Schiller, Apple's senior vice president of worldwide marketing, talks about AirPods during an event to announce new products, in San Francisco. AirPods are Bluetooth headsets designed to work seamlessly with Apple's software. The setup involves little more than opening the case near your phone and tapping "Connect." (AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez, File)

Apple's new iPhone 7 and 7 Plus are clearly improvements on their predecessors—even if the biggest change is actually an omission (of the traditional headphone jack). But are they improved enough to justify an upgrade?

If you're an iPhone user, it may depend on how long you've held onto your current iPhone. If you're a proud owner of the iPhone 6S or its plus-sized cousin, you probably don't need to rush out for the 7. But the 7 includes enough cumulative iPhone improvements from the past two years to tempt anyone still clinging to an older model.

For instance, the iPhone 7 is seriously water resistant; putting it under a faucet for a few minutes merely muffled the speakers and made the touch screen stop working until I dried it off. It's



In this Sept. 7, 2016, file photo, Phil Schiller, Apple's senior vice president of worldwide marketing, talks about the features on the new iPhone 7 earphone options during an event to announce new products, in San Francisco. The new iPhones are better, even when considering that the most dramatic change is what got taken away: the traditional headphone jack. Without a traditional headphone jack, wired headphones plug into the Lightning port normally used for charging. A 3-inch-long adapter is included for your old headphones. (AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez, File)

LISTENING WIRED ...

Without the traditional headphone jack, wired headphones plug into the Lightning port normally used for charging. But the jack's disappearance doesn't present the problem you might expect, given that iPhone 7 comes with a 3-inch-long adapter for your old headphones. A replacement costs \$9 if you lose it (I've misplaced one already in less than a week).

To charge your phone while listening, you need a \$99 battery case or a third-party adapter. Neither is included. Also, your iPhone 7 headphones won't work with any other device that uses the old-fashioned jack.



In this Sept. 7, 2016, file photo, Phil Schiller, Apple's senior vice president of worldwide marketing, talks about the pricing on the new iPhone 7 during an event to announce new products, in San Francisco. The new iPhones are better, even when considering that the most dramatic change is what got taken away: the traditional headphone jack. (AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez, File)

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... AND UNWIRED

Of course, you can just go wireless, as Apple would love you to do. Its upcoming \$159 AirPods are two tiny inch-and-a-half Bluetooth earpieces designed to integrate with Apple's software. Setting them up involves little more than opening the case near your

phone and tapping "Connect."

Audio plays automatically when you're wearing them, and pauses when you pop one out to talk to someone. Double tapping on an earpiece let me ask the Siri voice assistant to change the volume, rewind or check the weather. (They do look a little like dangling earrings when you have them in.)



In this Sept. 7, 2016, file photo, Apple CEO Tim Cook announces the new iPhone 7 during an event to announce new products, in San Francisco. Though owners of last year's iPhones might not need to rush out to get the iPhone 7 or 7 Plus, those clinging on to older models might find enough cumulative improvements from the past two years, including sharper photos at 12 megapixels, introduced last year. (AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez, File)

The AirPods picked up my voice pretty well, even when I spoke softly, and calls sounded fine in controlled environments. Siri had some trouble when Shakira blared in the background, but that's no different from using the phone in a loud bar. And next to a busy highway in New York, the call sounded fine to me, but the person I was speaking with thought it sounded like a speaker phone.

The AirPods did stay in my ears through one bike ride, eight runs and some jumps, though one dropped out as I changed my shirt.

Apple promises five hours of continuous use; I got well over that, although voice calls will eat up their

tiny batteries much faster. You can also double your listening by using one AirPods at a time. The AirPods come in a case that resembles a pack of dental floss; it also recharges the earpieces, extending usage to 24 hours. The Lightning charging cord for your phone can recharge the case, too.

But the AirPods still seem remarkably easy to lose. The case helps, but I also lose dental floss regularly (don't tell my dentist). I also get careless with wired headphones; I've even run a pair through the wash, which was no big deal since they cost just \$29. Of course, you might be more careful with \$160 accessories. Apple does plan to sell single earpieces and the case separately, but hasn't announced prices.

AirPods will work with older iPhones once they get the free <https://apnews.com/211b2659758546bd90efd689408d63c7/6-key-things-to-know-about-Apple's-new-iOS-10-software> upgrade. Connect them once, and they'll work on iPads and Macs on the same iCloud account, too. Though the iPhone 7 is available this Friday, AirPods won't come out until late October.

BETTER IMAGES



In this Monday, Sept. 12, 2016, photo, water is poured on an Apple iPhone 7, in Edison, N.J. The iPhone joins Samsung's flagship devices in offering water and dust resistance. It's meant for accidental spills and dunks, not for underwater use. The touch screen, for instance, won't be as responsive, and sound isn't as clear. (AP Photo/Anick Jesdanun)



The wired headphones that come with the 7 work just fine—and will still cost \$29 to replace. Apple isn't promising better sound—at least for now—despite the Lightning port's ability to deliver audio digitally. But third-party headsets might be able to offer advanced features such as noise cancellation without needing a separate battery.

This Thursday, Sept. 8, 2016, photo combo shows pictures of a commuter ferry taken from the same position with the iPhone 7 Plus, using the smartphone's regular lens, top, and its 2x zoom lens, bottom, in Tiburon, Calif. While smartphone cameras have long offered zooming, these are typically done with software tricks, so image quality suffers. The iPhone 7 Plus has a

second lens devoted to offering two-fold zoom without any image degradation. (AP Photo/Anick Jesdanun)

While smartphone cameras have long offered zooming, these are typically done with software tricks that degrade image quality. The iPhone 7 Plus has a second lens that offers 2X optical zoom without any image degradation. (Technically, it's not a true zoom lens, but it uses a separate camera system to achieve a similar effect.)

Twice the magnification might not sound like much, but it makes a big difference when you're zeroing in on one aspect of a scene. If you then need "digital zoom"—as those software tricks are known—you're at least starting out with a sharper image. For close-ups, the zoom lens lets you step back to keep your shadow out of the shot.

It's a shame the iPhone 7 doesn't have the second lens as well, but it might take a few years for that to happen. Something similar occurred with anti-shake technology, which took two years to move from the Plus to the regular size starting with the iPhone 7.

The selfie camera also got better in the iPhone 7. Resolution increases to 7 megapixels, from 5 megapixels, so the selfie camera no longer feels inferior.

right, in Edison, N.J. At right, the photographer's shadow is able to be eliminated by standing further back and zooming in on the mailbox. While smartphone cameras have long offered zooming, these are typically done with software tricks, so image quality suffers. The iPhone 7 Plus has a second lens devoted to offering two-fold zoom without any image degradation. (AP Photo/Anick Jesdanun)

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS

The new iPhones now have stereo speakers and play audio twice as loud as before. I could do the dishes with the faucet running and still hear my music without putting on headphones. The screens are also brighter, which could help in direct sunlight.

Apple says battery life improves by an hour or two, thanks to higher capacity and efficiencies. No battery is ever going to be enough, but Apple promises 12 to 15 hours of internet use.

If you do upgrade, consider the new jet black model. The back is polished so finely that it looks like glass, yet has the strength of aluminum. It smudges easily—but of course you ought to have a case anyway.



This Monday, Sept. 12, 2016, photo combo shows pictures taken with the iPhone 7 Plus, using the



This Saturday, Sept. 10, 2016, photo combo shows selfies taken with Apple's iPhone 6s, top, and iPhone 7, bottom, in New York's Central Park. The selfie camera got better in the iPhone 7, with resolution increasing to 7 megapixels, from 5 megapixels. (AP Photo/Anick Jesdanun)

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