

Tech review: A quality phone that's affordable

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Alcatel. You've heard of the brand from France but you're not sure about its products.

In the phone world, it's known for Android handsets that fill a niche just below what we'd call "flagship phones."

Many don't hesitate to spend \$700 or \$800 or more on a phone, but if you're looking to spend less, you're probably looking at phones like the Alcatel Idol 4S (\$399.99, alcatelonetouch.us).

Alcatel has competition in the midtier phone market. The OneTouch 3 was released about the same time last summer for roughly the same price.

Alcatel is trying to stand out by including a number of accessories with the Idol 4S - a [virtual reality headset](#), glass screen protector, JBL earbuds and an Incipio case.

The phone is nicely made with glass and metal. There are no physical buttons on the front. The left side has a sleep-wake button, and volume buttons

are on the right side.

Also, the right side is dominated by a large round button Alcatel calls the Boom key, which can be assigned to different shortcuts, like launching an app or taking a photo.

When you're on a call, pressing the Boom key engages a noise canceling sound enhancement, which is nice, but it would also be nice to have it on by default.

I'm guessing it's a big battery drain.

The AMOLED touch screen is 5.5 inches and has a resolution of 2,560-by-1,440 pixels for a density of 534 pixels per inch, matching the screen of the Samsung Galaxy S7 Edge.

There is a fingerprint sensor on the phone's back cover under the camera lens.

Inside, the Idol 4S is powered by a Qualcomm Snapdragon 652 octa-core processor with an Adreno 510 graphics card.

There's 32 gigabytes of onboard storage and 3 gigabytes of RAM. The 4S also has a microSD card slot to add up to an extra 256 gigabytes of storage.

The operating system is Android 6.0.1 (Marshmallow).

The main camera has a 16-megapixel sensor with an f/2.0 lens. It can also shoot 4K video and has a dual-LED flash.

The front camera has an 8-megapixel sensor, shoots 1080p video and has an LED flash for selfies.

Sensors inside include an accelerometer, gyro, proximity and compass. There's also an FM radio.

The phone has Quick Charge 2.0, which can charge the unremovable 3,000 mAh battery from zero to 60 percent in 30 minutes.

The charging and sync port is microUSB.

Physically, the phone measures 6.06-by-2.97-by-0.28 inches and weighs 5.26 ounces.

The 4S has 802.11ac Wi-Fi and Bluetooth 4.2.

It's a GSM phone, so you can't use it on Verizon or Sprint, which don't use GSM networks for their systems.

VIRTUAL REALITY

The Idol 4S comes with a VR headset, which is a first for me.

I've seen Samsung give away its Gear VR headset with the purchase of the S7 or S7 Edge as an introductory offer, but I can't remember another phone that comes boxed with the headset.

There are a few VR games installed and a VR store app loaded on the phone.

The headset was comfortable.

CONCLUSIONS

The Idol 4S is a good phone.

Most people are attracted to flagship phones like the S7 Edge or iPhone, but since phone companies stopped subsidizing handsets, we see exactly what those phones will cost us.

I hear from people every week asking about recommendations for a phone that won't break the bank.

My advice is to figure out your budget and visit your wireless carrier's store to see what is offered in your price range.

If the iPhone 7 or Galaxy S7 Edge seem too expensive, phones like the Idol 4S are a good

compromise, with a lower price and specs that are almost as good as the flagship phones.

The 4S doesn't have the fastest CPU, and it has a bit less RAM and storage. It's not waterproof, but it is big and has a clear, bright screen. It has expandable storage and takes nice photos and videos.

Overall it's a good choice, and the included accessories make the 4S a good deal, especially if you are already in the market for a VR headset.

Amazon has the 4S for sale without the VR headset for about \$50 less.

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Alcatel Idol 4S

Pros: Big screen, microSD slot, good camera, included extras are nice.

Cons: Not waterproof, could use more RAM

Bottom line: At almost half the price of high-end flagship phones, the 4S can do the job for most people.

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