

## New Treo 600 Rules, With Bright Screen and Long Battery Life

Handspring has done it again. In 2001, the little company introduced the best combination phone, PDA and e-mail device on the market, the Treo. Now, Handspring has topped itself with its all-new version, the Treo 600.

Sprint will start selling the Treo 600 in the U.S. by mid-October for \$500 to \$550. In Europe, the wireless-phone carrier Orange is also about to start selling it as well. Handspring expects to offer Treo 600s that can be used on the Cingular and T-Mobile networks a few weeks after the Sprint model makes its debut, and may sell it for AT&T customers later in the year.

I've been carrying a Sprint Treo 600 around for a couple of weeks and I love it. It's a great phone, an excellent mobile e-mail terminal and a full-fledged Palm-compatible PDA. I prefer it to any RIM BlackBerry model I have tested, and it blows away any of the PDA/phones based on Microsoft's Pocket PC operating system.

As good as the original Treo was, it had several flaws. First, it looked more like a PDA than a phone. Second, its battery life was barely adequate, at 2.5 to three hours of talk time. Third, its screen was too dim to be seen well outdoors. And fourth, its memory couldn't be expanded.

The Treo 600 resolves all of those concerns. It's narrower and there's no longer a lid to protrude, so the device looks much more natural and phone-like against the ear. Also, battery life has been drastically improved. The Sprint model will get four to five hours of talk time and the model for the other carriers, which use a lower-power radio technology, will get six to seven hours.

The new Treo's color screen is much brighter than before -- in fact it's the brightest I've ever seen on a hand-held device. And the Treo 600 now has a memory expansion slot that accepts the popular SD memory cards used in digital cameras and music players.



The Treo 600

Speaking of which, the Treo 600 has an MP3 music player and a built-in digital camera. The music function is startlingly good, better than on any standard phone I've tested. It has a separate speaker optimized for music. The camera, like most on cellphones, is low-resolution and lacks a flash. Some of the indoor shots I took were very poor, but most of my test pictures were fine for e-mailing.

Unlike the older Treo, this new model can be operated most of the time with just one hand. A new five-way control pad and rewritten software combine to make it unnecessary most of the time to take out the stylus and tap on the screen.

There is still a full keyboard for typing e-mails, memos and other data. It's narrower than in the original Treo, but the keys have domed tops that help compensate for their closer spacing. I found I could type quickly and with few typos on the new keyboard. But at least one woman who tried my test Treo 600 hated the keyboard, saying it was incompatible with long nails.

I was able to run my favorite hand-held e-mail program, SnapperMail, which can automatically fetch and send your e-mail from standard Internet e-mail services as often as you like.

Handspring has its own new, free e-mail program that will be available on most versions of the Treo 600, and Sprint is providing its own e-mail program and service.

I also tested several other third-party Palm programs, including games, and all ran perfectly. I was able to synchronize the calendar and address book with my Windows PC, and the Treo 600 is also Mac compatible.

The built-in Web browser has been rewritten for greater speed and compatibility. It can now download programs and other files, such as ring tones for the phone, direct to the device without first loading them onto a PC.

Everything feels much faster, especially the processing of e-mail and Web pages. That's because the Treo 600 has a much faster processor than the old model and double the internal memory.

There are some differences between the Sprint model, which runs on the cellphone technology called CDMA, and the other models that run on the GSM technology. The Sprint model can send and receive data about 30% faster than the versions for Orange, Cingular and T-Mobile. But the GSM versions get about 50% more battery life and can be used both in the U.S. and Europe.

The Sprint and Orange models are a dark charcoal-gray color, while the models Handspring will sell to Cingular and T-Mobile users are silver-colored.

There are a few drawbacks to the Treo 600. It's a little thicker and heavier than the earlier model. Also, the screen, while very bright, is low in resolution, or sharpness, compared with the latest screens offered by competing PDAs.

Finally, in an effort to simplify the phone function, Handspring has made it harder to get to the Treo's excellent speed-dial screens. The company says it will eventually provide options to reverse these changes.

Still, the Treo 600 is a big step forward for the wireless PDA. It is Handspring's last product as an independent company, because Palm is absorbing both the company and the Treo product line early next year. Palm intends to continue to develop the line. It's a great way for Handspring to exit the stage.

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