Tech[nology]News:
Samsung Galaxy SIII proves reliable, rivals iPhone popularity

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If Apple had a long lost twin in the mobile market, it would have to be Samsung. Gaining confidence from the widespread success of the Galaxy S and the Galaxy SII, Samsung has begun to build up excitement and anticipation for its new devices just as well as Apple, the masters of the art. This was the case with the new Samsung Galaxy SIII. Rumors flew for weeks about the Galaxy SIII, and Samsung made sure to do what it could to fire up the excitement caused by these rumors without confirming them. Because of all this hype, the Samsung Galaxy SIII was already seen as the next 'big' device before it was even released. But can the Samsung Galaxy SIII live up to this hype months after its announcement and compete with the iPhone 5? TechNews was able to get a hold of an SIII from AT&T several weeks ago and has been putting it through its paces to see if it can.

Just by picking up the Galaxy SIII, it is clear that Samsung put more thought into the design of this phone than it ever has before. The device is sleek, thin, and light, with a construction that makes the phone feel like one complete piece, even though it is made up of many. Unlike the iPhone and most other smartphones, the corners of the entire device itself are rounded, almost making it look like a pebble. It's drastically different and will certainly ensure that this device doesn't have any problems with Apple's legal team. Samsung has said that months of secret design work went into the design of the SIII, and it really shows when you pick it up. The phone feels very ergonomic in the hand despite having an abnormally large 4.8 inch screen. Even with the large screen, the placement of the device's buttons makes it easy to use with one hand. My only complaint about the hardware of the SIII is the color of the device. My review device had Samsung's 'Pebble Blue' color, which is a blue-gray color with a finish that makes it look like brushed aluminum. It looks very odd and has an unaesthetic contrast with the solid screen. As convincing as the finish is, it still looks like fake metal, which is a turn-off in my opinion.

These days, the screen of a smartphone is important enough to get its own focus. The Samsung Galaxy SIII has a 4.8 inch screen with a 16:9 aspect ratio. It is a Super AMOLED Pentile display with a resolution of 1280x720. While Pentile displays typically have a subpixel arrangement that lowers the quality of the display, this is not a problem on this device. The display is very good, with vibrant colors and sharp clarity. The brightness of the display is consistently low, however. This can be fixed by setting the brightness higher in the settings, but this lowers battery life. As good as the display on the SIII is, it is not nearly as good as the display on the HTC One X. While this is all relative and both displays are excellent, a new SIII owner may be a little disappointed if they see their screen next to the One X.

The Galaxy SIII has an eight megapixel camera that delivers. Photo quality is excellent and has many features. The camera on the SIII was compared to that of the iPhone 4, which is widely considered to have the best camera available on a smartphone, and found to be even better. It's a surprise from Samsung, who has been known to typically place weak cameras on their phones.

The Galaxy SIII runs Android 4.0 Ice Cream Sandwich with Samsung's TouchWiz overlay. Samsung has spent a lot of time skinning Android for the Samsung Galaxy SIII, and it results in a very cohesive software experience. The SIII's software has an overarching nature theme, which Samsung dubbed 'Nature UI,' that brings together its design. Things are kept simple while sounds, colors, and images come from nature. While I generally abhor phones that don't run vanilla Android and throw skinned Android devices out the window whenever I can, I found Samsung's overlays to not be that bad. Although I prefer the experience provided by stock Android to the one provided by TouchWiz, the experience on the SIII is not bad and one I could live with. With its overlay, Samsung adds many features to the device not found on stock Android, one of which is the return of the menu button. With Android 4.0, Google decided to remove the menu button that had long been a part of its UI, replacing it with a button in most apps. While bringing back the menu button makes sense for older apps that haven't been updated for Google's new design standards, the menu button is useless and a waste of space in newer apps. Another feature added by Samsung is something known as Pop-up Play. With Pop-up Play, it is possible to have a window with video playing run over other apps. For instance, you could watch a movie while in the Gmail app responding to emails. While this doesn't sound that practical, with the SIII's large screen size it works well. Samsung also adds many apps to the SIII to complement the user experience. Almost all of these apps work well. S Memo is a good note-taking app that gives users a lot of features while being simple and easy to use. S Beam enhances the Android Beam feature introduced in Android 4.0 so you can share photos and videos with others via NFC. Kies Air is the best way to sync your phone to your computer that I have ever seen, better than iTunes. But not all of the apps Samsung adds are good. The best example of this is S Voice, Samsung's answer to Siri. It's an app that allows you to ask your phone questions to search things and perform simple tasks.

While the app's voice recognition is good, it can't really do much. It seems half-baked and pointless and is a complete let down. Just as bad is the phone's keyboard. The keyboard has an over-aggressive text prediction that slows down typing instead of speeding it up. It's very frustrating and led to me downloading and installing a different keyboard from the Google Play Store.

If you happen to use your smartphone to make phone calls, the SIII won't let you down. Call quality on the SIII is excellent. Calls are clear, static free, and sound almost as good as a landline.

Finally, the battery life on the SIII is very good. It easily lasts a whole day, even under heavy use. This is a surprise considering the large screen on the phone and the 4G LTE radio that it has. The battery life is better than most smartphones. Samsung has ensured that the battery life of the SIII is not its Achilles' heel.

At the end of the day, I would say that the Samsung Galaxy SIII lived up to the hype. While not perfect, the SIII delivers in almost all categories and is probably the best smartphone you could buy today. It does all everyday tasks very well while looking good. Its flaws usually are with small features that most people wouldn't use. It's only major flaw is the awful text-prediction on its keyboard, which can either be turned off in the settings or replaced with another keyboard from the Google Play store. Samsung claimed that the SIII was the next big thing, and it certainly is. Compared to an iPhone 5, the SIII is better in almost every category. This seems to be the opinion of the average consumer as well. The Samsung has sold over 90 million SIIIs since its release, making it the world's most popular smartphone, with a market share of over 10 percent compared to the iPhone's nine percent. The Samsung Galaxy SIII is available on all major carriers in the United States.
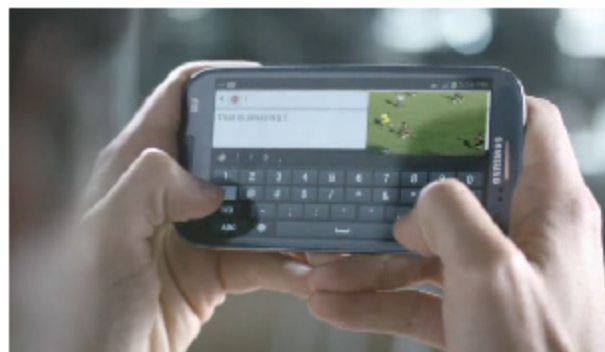

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