



Sony Ericsson blurs the line between a full-featured smartphone and a basic phone and comes away with positive results.

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IT IS interesting to note how Malaysian and American phone users differ — while Americans tend to think of phones as an extension of a PC and demand e-mail and a Qwerty keyboard, Malaysians (and most of the world) treat the phone as a voice and SMS-centric device, making the Qwerty keyboard less of a necessity.

It also helps that the rest of the world seem to be able to use the alphanumeric keypad and T9 input a lot better.

Anyway the reason for this short rant/observation is that these days I've come to realise that having a phone that responds fast to things I mostly do on it — i.e. SMS, voice calling and a bit of light surfing — is way more important than having a feature-packed phone that's slow to respond and is hard to access the most common tasks.

Enter the Sony Ericsson C905 slider phone, which certainly blurs the line between a full-featured smartphone which does everything and a basic phone with a less extensible operating system.

In terms of hardware, the C905 has everything most smartphones come with these days — support for HSDPA, Bluetooth, GPS and even WiFi, together with the applications that take advantage of the hardware.

On top of that, the C905 is also a Cyber-shot branded Sony Ericsson phone and comes with a whopping 8.1-megapixel autofocus digicam with a Xenon flash built in.

When you consider just what Sony Ericsson has managed to pack in, it's actually relatively small compared to most of the competition, and as you'll soon see, this phone has a few little tricks up its sleeve as well.

The package

The C905 has quite a number of

A SMART SLIDER

accessories packed into the box. Apart from the phone, charger and ubiquitous wired headset, you get a USB sync cable and a USB card reader for the Memory Stick Micro card.

All in all, a pretty good bundle. Aesthetically-speaking, this phone isn't bad looking at all, and in fact, Sony Ericsson have fixed a number of problems I had with earlier models like the K800 and the K810.

Most notably, the camera's lens cover has a very nifty sliding mechanism which keeps the cover flush with the rest of the body, preventing any edges from getting caught on your pants and inadvertently sliding open the cover as you put it into your pocket.

In all the time I had it for review, the cover never once opened accidentally and took pictures of the inside of my pocket as the K800 often did when I tested it.



The slider design is a matter of preference of course, and although I prefer candy bar style phones, I got used to the C905 after a couple of days of using it.

What I wasn't too happy about is that the alphanumeric keys are a completely flat membrane type, with no separation between adjacent keys — now, I have pretty small fingers, and even so, I found that I still occasionally pressed the wrong key when typing out a few quick messages.

I generally found the buttons a lot easier to press if I use my fingernail instead of the ball of my thumb, but even then, it would have been better if Sony Ericsson had made a little groove for your nail for each key.

On the upside, the buttons on the side of the phone (volume, play, photo/video selector and shutter button) are very well placed, with lit shortcuts on the front for various photo-related functions when in digicam mode.

Turn on the phone and you'll get a truly beautiful 2.5in screen with truly exceptional colour and contrast.

Phone features

As far as the phone functions go, the C905 is no slouch and comes with



CYBER-SHOT: The C905 slider phone has a gorgeous screen and an 8.1-megapixel digicam.

everything you'd expect from a high-end phone — HSDPA, UMTS 2100, quad-band GSM and of course support for Bluetooth headsets, etc.

Call quality was good and the speakerphone function is louder and clearer than on my now aging K618L.

The C905 is a reasonably fast phone in terms of menu response — it's not the fastest, but certainly faster than on smartphones with true operating systems.

Response times are quite satisfactory to me and require only one or two button clicks to get to the SMS application or call and contact lists.

Battery life with WiFi turned off will typically be about a full day or a day and a half if you're not a heavy phone user.

However, with WiFi turned on, battery life really suffers, and you get about a day if you leave WiFi on, or less than that if you surf a lot.

Extras

As I mentioned before, one thing that the C905 is not lacking in is hardware features and this deserves quite a bit of looking at.

First off, the C905 has built-in A-GPS that comes with both Google Maps and a trial version of Wayfinder Navigator which offers voice turn-by-turn navigation. It's again sad that Sony Ericsson,

like Nokia, doesn't just bundle the full version of the navigation software and maps together with the phone as it would mean that you could really take full advantage of the GPS right out of the box.

Having said that, Google Maps is not too shabby and now does offer routing as well, although without voice navigation.

Next up is WiFi — on the hardware front, the WiFi on the phone works extremely well and seamlessly transfers between WiFi hotspots and 3G/HSDPA when you're surfing. The NetFront browser comes bundled with the phone and works just fine, although if you want a more full-featured browser that displays webpages as it should look, you can try downloading the free Opera Mini from mini.opera.com.

However, that's not all that the WiFi allows you to do — the phone is actually DLNA certified, which means that once you're connected to your home WiFi network, other DLNA devices like the Sony PlayStation3 for example, will see the phone as a media server and be able to play photos, music and videos right on the PS3.

I don't own a PS3, but from what I can ascertain from the phone's menus, the setup is pretty straightforward.

That's not all, the C905 even comes with SIP (Session Initiation Protocol) settings, which means you can also

C905

(Sony Ericsson)
3G phone with HSDPA
CAMERA: 8.1-megapixels, autofocus with Xenon flash
DISPLAY: 2.5in 262,144 colours (240 x 320pixels)
MESSAGING: MMS, SMS, e-mail, instant messaging
CONNECTIVITY: Bluetooth, HSDPA
PHONE MEMORY: 160MB
EXPANSION SLOT: Memory Stick Micro (M2), 512MB included
BATTERY TYPE: 930 mAh lithium-ion
STANDBY/TALK TIME: 360/4 hours
OTHER FEATURES: GPS, FM radio, MP3 player, video player, Java applications
WEIGHT: 136g
DIMENSIONS (W x D x H): 4.9 x 1.8 x 10.4cm
PRICE: RM1,999
Review unit courtesy of Sony Ericsson Malaysia. 1-800-88-9900

set up and initiate VoIP calls — quite a geek thing that probably won't be used by the typical C905 buyer, but certainly could save you loads of money making calls over the regular phone network if you know how to set it up.

Like every generation of Sony Ericsson phones, there are a number of small changes to the interface, and the C905 is no exception.

The most major change in the phone is that the multimedia browser now looks much like the interface of the PlayStation3 — it's pretty easy to use, but does look quite different from the rest of the interface.

Oh yes, the phone also comes with an orientation sensor built in which works with supported applications — the browser, for instance, will automatically go into landscape mode when you turn it on its side.

The digicam

The C905 produces perfectly usable pictures and is actually not bad for a phone, although as expected, cramming 8.1-million pixels into a sensor smaller than your thumbnail produces an image with a lot of obvious noise reduction.

While I would have liked more control of the ISO settings, the camera itself does automatically increase the ISO when shooting in low light conditions.

The Xenon flash works well and exposures were generally spot on when the flash is on.

Conclusion

Although there was an initial period of getting used to the very flat buttons, I actually really liked the Sony Ericsson C905.

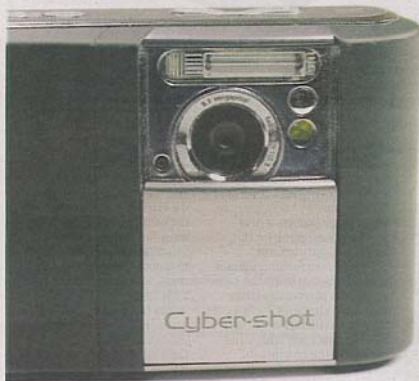
Despite the camera's multitude of functions, the all-important phone features functioned smoothly and were very easy to get to — this doesn't sound like much until you consider just how difficult it is to get to a simple thing like SMS or MMS in some other smartphones with more full-featured operating systems.

The other feature I was really happy about was the addition of WiFi — you may not notice the switchover when you're browsing and connect to a WiFi hotspot, but your wallet will certainly feel the difference if you're a person who likes to surf on your mobile phone a lot.

As for GPS and the 8.1-megapixel camera — well that's just the icing on the cake.

Pros: Feature-packed phone; reasonable price.

Cons: Buttons are a little too flat for fast typing.



SLIDE OVER: The nifty sliding mechanism of the Sony Ericsson C905 always sits flush with the rest of the phone's body, minimising the chances of the cover catching against something in your pocket.