

i-technology

Awkward Phone, So-So Tablet

A scorecard on the new Dell Streak

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I've been feeling very self-conscious when talking on the phone in public, and it's not because I'm worried about strangers listening in on my private conversations.

Rather, it's because the cell phone I'm using — the just-released Dell Streak — is actually a touch-screen tablet device that makes some of the clunkiest handsets from the late '90s look diminutive by comparison.

The Streak (\$300 with a two-year AT&T contract) is a complicated gadget. For a tablet computer, it is fairly small and thin — a fraction the size of Apple Inc.'s popular iPad. Its face is dominated by a touch screen that is 5 inches diagonally, compared with the iPad's 9.7-inch display. Yet Dell insists it is also a phone, and as such it is fairly enormous and uncomfortable to talk on. Beyond that, it comes with an older version of Google Inc.'s Android software. Overall, it's just too awkward to bear.

Still, I figured the Streak's size would be great for at least one thing: watching videos. As expected, videos streamed well from such sites as YouTube and Funny or Die, probably helped by the device's 1 GHz processor. Images looked sharp and bright on the screen. They didn't look quite as stellar as they do on Apple's latest iPhone or Samsung's new Galaxy S smartphones, though.

There is plenty of storage space on the Streak for the videos you want to watch (and for photos and songs, too), as it includes a 16-gigabyte microSD memory card. And the device's battery seemed to have no problem getting through a day filled with video and music streaming, Web surfing and chatting.

But using it to instant message my friends was more difficult than on other touch-screen keyboards I've used; despite the Streak's size, I kept hitting the wrong keys.

The Streak didn't sound bad, but it didn't sound great, either.

Beyond the Streak's basic awkwardness, its biggest flaw is that it relies on old software. Despite the inclusion of a swift processor, the Streak is saddled with an older version of the Android operating software — version 1.6 — which means it is missing some of latest features and can't run some applications that call for newer operating software. It also lacks Adobe's Flash Player 10.1



The Dell Streak phone displayed during a product review in San Francisco. (AP Photo)

for watching Flash videos.

Dell Inc. says the Streak will get what is currently the latest Android software, version 2.2, later this year and will get Flash 10.1, too. I'm stymied by decision to not even start out the Streak with version 2.1, which is available on a number of current smart phones.

Another odd handicap: Although the Streak has a low-resolution front-facing camera, which could

as perhaps the biggest viewfinder you've ever used. There are plenty of options for adjusting your shots, and I was able to take a bunch of crisp shots. You'll need to hold it steady while snapping, though, because the Streak takes a long time to take a photo after you've pressed its shutter button.

And you'll probably want to use headphones with the Streak, as the quality of its built-in speaker is dis-

Fortunately, the Streak comes with fully functional 5-megapixel digital camera on its back. The camera takes sharp images and has a bright flash, and the display functions as perhaps the biggest viewfinder you've ever used.

be used for video chatting, it's only currently enabled for taking photos and videos. Video chat is expected to work when the device gets the Android software update, but for now it feels like quite a tease.

Fortunately, the Streak comes with fully functional 5-megapixel digital camera on its back. The camera takes sharp images and has a bright flash, and the display func-

mal. When watching a Ted Leo And The Pharmacists music video online, the sound was muddled, even at a low volume. Because the speaker is located on the Streak's back, it gets even harder to hear when you set the gadget down.

Fresher software will surely improve the Streak, but whether you're looking for a phone, a tablet computer or both, the Streak falls short.

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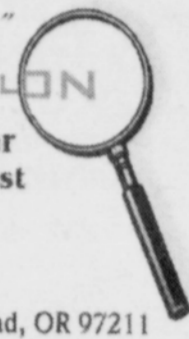
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