

Tech Talk: More and faster smartphone choices than ever

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Periodically, Verizon Wireless will send me some of its newer smartphones to evaluate and provide feedback. Most recently, I had the opportunity to review the Casio G'zOne and the Samsung Fascinate.

Most notably, each phone, as well as a host of other models, run on the new 4G/LTE high-speed networks. This means you now have Internet speeds in the palm of your hand that rival what you may have at home or at work. It's quite impressive. What's also quite impressive is the raw processing power of these new phones.

The Casio G'zOne is a rugged phone. It's waterproof, shockproof and as close to indestructible as you can get in a hand-held device. There are rumors this device was modeled after military specifications. To give it a thorough test, I not only put it through its paces, I also gave it to my 15-year-old daughter for a few days. Over the years, she has burned through more phones than I care to remember. At one point, she was even cut off by the phone insurance because we had to replace too many phones in too short a time frame. But that's a story for another column ...; or not.

Perhaps the best way to summarize my review of this phone is that when she gave it back to me, she practically begged that we get one for her. It's remarkably thin and light for a rugged phone, perhaps its most impressive feature. I would have expected a much thicker and heavier phone, but it compares well to other mainstream smartphones. It's based on the Android operating system, which continues to improve and become a very worthy competitor to Apple's iPhone. It has all the applications and features you would hope for in a small, light and very durable package.

The Samsung Fascinate is a more traditional smartphone, but with one of the larger screens on the market today. Its super-bright and crisp 4-inch screen practically jumps out at you when you pick it up. It is a very comfortable phone to use and, like the Casio, it is blazing fast. To get a real test of the phone, this time I turned to my 20-year-old college student daughter, and her review was that it was the best non-iPhone smartphone she had used. Again, an excellent review, considering the source.

One of the most difficult things in selecting a new smartphone is the sheer number of choices. Do you get an iPhone or an Android, a Blackberry or Windows phone? Do you get one with a physical keyboard, how large a screen, how much memory and processing power? You can work yourself into quite a conundrum trying to answer these questions. The good news is that for most users, you just can't make a bad decision. Some of these devices, like the new Motorola Droid Bionic, much like it's cousin the Motorola Atrix on the AT&T network, can dock into a keyboard and screen that makes them look and act more like a laptop than a phone.

As I have recommended in the past, the best thing you can do is go to your local store and try a few out. Clearly, if you have a need for a rugged phone, you will definitely want the Casio G'zOne. That is hands down a unique phone designed to fill a void in the market. People working in construction or other demanding environments will love this phone. Unlike in the past, you will not sacrifice features for durability. If durability is not your primary need, then check out the different phones and pick the one that feels best to you. You won't go wrong, especially not with these newer, faster devices.

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