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Samsung Transform (Sprint)

●●○○ EDITOR RATING: **GOOD** 0 COMMENTS

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PROS

Punchy voice quality. Sublime QWERTY keyboard. Useful Sprint ID customizations.

CONS

Somewhat sluggish. Short battery life. Heavy, poor voice dialing.

BOTTOM LINE

The Samsung Transform features Sprint's nifty new ID interface, but don't expect the performance of a high-end Android phone here.

BY JAMIE LENDINO The \$149.99 Samsung Transform is an Android phone with a twist: it features Sprint's new Sprint ID interface. Sprint ID lets you transform the UI based on your interests. Your device can become a Disney phone, a car enthusiast's phone, or an ESPN phone. It's not as exciting or anywhere near as fast as the **HTC EVO 4G** (\$199, 4 stars), but that's not the Transform's raison d'être. Instead, it's meant as a low-cost upgrade for someone with a feature phone looking to go smart. In that capacity, the Transform succeeds.

Design and Call Quality

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iPhone Users Are About to Be Screwed Over

The Transform measures 4.6 by 2.4 by 0.6 inches (HWD) and weighs 5.4 ounces. It's pretty smooth and sleek looking, with no extraneous ridges or buttons on the glossy front panel. The screen is also entirely flush, with tapered edges. The soft-touch back panel felt expensive, and made the handset comfortable to hold during voice calls.

 **VIEW ALL 6 PHOTOS IN GALLERY**

The 3.5-inch, 320-by-480-pixel, glass capacitive LCD is standard for midrange Android phones. It wasn't the brightest or most colorful I've tested, but it looked good. Dialing numbers elicited haptic feedback from the panel, but it was a sluggish affair; I usually had to wait for the handset to catch up to my number taps.

The slide-out, four-row QWERTY keyboard adds some bulk to the handset. That said, the oversize, flat keys were perfect for those with larger hands. The four touch buttons at the bottom of the screen are easy to use, except in the dark; each time the backlight goes out, you have to remember where they are in order to use them.

The Transform is a dual-band EV-DO Rev. A (850/1900 MHz) device with 802.11b/g Wi-Fi; the Transform connected to my WPA2-encrypted network without issue. Voice quality was solid in both directions, with plenty of extra volume in the earpiece, and static-free transmissions. The tone wasn't quite as warm as some other Samsung phones I've tested, with a slightly ringy quality to voices, but overall it was still very good. Callers loved the Transform's clarity, and reception was also solid. Calls also sounded fine through an **Aliph Jawbone Icon** (\$99, 4 stars) Bluetooth headset. The voice dialing app was a total misfire; I never got it to dial a single number properly, and I couldn't activate it from the Bluetooth headset either. The speakerphone was just loud enough for outdoor use. Battery life was a little low at 4 hours and 10 minutes of talk time.

User Interface, Sprint ID, and Apps

The Transform's star unique feature is Sprint ID, which lets you customize the phone with different "packs." Packs consist of apps, ringtones, widgets, and wallpapers. Switching Sprint ID packs was much more cumbersome than I expected. None came preloaded on my phone; instead, I had to log into Sprint's portal using the Sprint ID icon in the main menu, select a pack, and download it. Aside from some additional sluggishness, the app configurations are interesting, fairly specific, and pretty useful. (I liked Auto Enthusiast, with its preloaded apps for famous car magazines, because I'm a car nut.)

Otherwise, the Transform is a fairly standard Android device. The stock home screen looks like a typical Android 2.1 phone. You can swipe between five panes; some come preloaded with useful weather, clock, and wireless radio control widgets from the factory. The Transform packs an 800 MHz ARM11 CPU. That may have been OK last year, but Sprint ID seems to weigh down the proceedings considerably.

Sprint overloads the main menu with its usual odd compliment of NASCAR, football, Sprint TV, and other bloatware. I had no problem connecting to Gmail and corporate Exchange accounts. The WebKit browser makes quick work of WAP and desktop HTML Web pages. Android Market offers over 100,000 third-party apps, most of which should work just fine on the Transform's relatively standard OS build.

Multimedia, Camera, and Conclusions

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There's 180MB of free internal storage, and a microSD card slot underneath the stiff battery cover; my 16GB SanDisk card worked fine. Bluetooth 3.0 is on board, and the standard-size 3.5mm headphone jack is a boon for music lovers with upgraded earbuds. Music tracks sounded clear and bright over **Motorola S9-HD** (\$149, 3.5 stars) stereo Bluetooth headphones. The stock music player displayed large album art graphics when available. Standalone videos played smoothly in full screen mode, with unbroken stereo Bluetooth sound. But on more than one occasion, higher resolution files stumbled, with uneven frame rates.

The Transform packs two cameras. The front-facing VGA camera allows for video conferencing, but we haven't found any decent Android video chat software yet. The rear-mounted 3.2-megapixel camera does standard photo and camcorder duties; there's also an LED flash, but no auto-focus. Test photos looked pretty good overall, with decent light balance, and good noise suppression even in lower light environments. Recorded videos were a dim disappointment at 352-by-288 pixels and 15 frames per second.

At \$150, I feel the Transform is a bit too expensive for its feature set. It should replace the very similar (but not quite as good) \$99 **Samsung Intercept** (3 stars), and my gut feeling is Sprint will discount this phone sooner rather than later. We probably would have given the Transform another half-star if it cost \$50 less up front. That said, the Transform is a good choice for heavy texters, and Sprint ID is one of the more useful Android UI tricks I've seen.

Benchmarks:

Continuous talk time: 4 hours 10 minutes


Compare the Samsung Transform (Sprint) with several other mobile phones side by side

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BY JAMIE LENDINO

SENIOR ANALYST, MOBILE


 Jamie Lendino is a senior mobile analyst for PCMag.com and has written for the magazine since 2005. He reviews cell phones, GPS devices, and other consumer electronics. Previously, Jamie was the Editor-in-Chief of Smart Device...

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