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Samsung Galaxy S II Epic 4G Touch LAPTOP EDITORS' CHOICE

Review

by Michael A. Prospero on September 14, 2011

★★★★☆

Pros: Large bright screen; Excellent 8-MP camera; Loud speaker; Decent video calling

Cons: Mediocre battery life; Slow 4G speeds; No HDMI port

The Verdict: With a 4.5-inch display and superfast processor, the Samsung Galaxy S II Epic 4G Touch is a smartphone force to be reckoned with.

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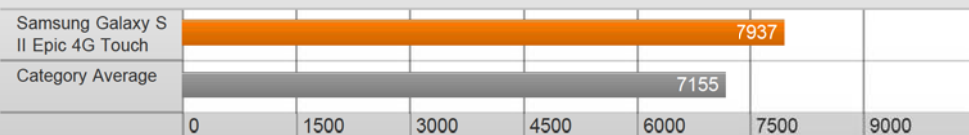
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Samsung's [Epic 4G](#) for Sprint was one of the best smartphones of all time, and now the Galaxy S II Epic 4G Touch looks to pick up right where its predecessor left off. This \$199 device loses the physical keyboard but gains a much larger display (4.5 inches vs. 4 inches), a speedier dual-core 1.2-GHz processor, and an 8-MP camera that can shoot 1080p video. Considering that all of this comes in a 0.38-inch thin package, the Epic 4G Touch has all the right ingredients to be Sprint's top phone--yes, even if the carrier gets the [iPhone 5](#). Read on to find out if Sprint's version of the Galaxy S II lives up to the Epic part of the device's very long name.

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Design

As with most smartphones, the glossy black front of the Epic 4G is dominated by its touchscreen, only here it's all the more impressive due to its 5.1 x 2.7-inch footprint, which is slightly smaller than the [Infuse 4G](#) (5.2 x 2.8 inches). And we're not just talking about the display, either. The Epic 4G Touch feels lighter than it should, no doubt owing to its wafer-thin 0.38-inch thickness. Which is not to say it's heavy: At 4.5 ounces, it's more than an ounce lighter than the [Photon 4G](#) (5.8 ounces) and about half an ounce lighter than the Infuse 4G. Overall, we like the look of the Epic 4G Touch, but we prefer the Photon 4G's design flourishes, such as the chrome trim and soft-touch back.

As with the Infuse 4G, those with smaller hands may have difficulty holding the phone in one hand and typing with a thumb.

Flip the Epic 4G Touch over, and you can see that it's a direct descendant of the Infuse 4G: The removable back plastic cover has a textured pattern that keeps fingerprints away. Like the Infuse 4G, the bottom bulges out slightly, but it's less noticeable here. Towards the top is the 8MP camera with flash, only it's surrounded by an oval plate, not a rectangular one. Given its massive size, though, we wish the Epic 4G Touch had a kickstand in the back, like the Photon 4G.

Around the edges of the Epic 4G Touch, you'll find the basics. The bottom has a micro USB port, and the top a 3.5mm headphone jack. A power button is on the right, and volume controls are on the left. There's no HDMI port onboard but Samsung sells an HDMI adapter that plugs into the microUSB port so you can stream video and other content to your TV.



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Display and Audio

When you've got one of the largest screens on the market, you better make sure it's good. Thankfully, the Epic 4G Touch's 4.5-inch Super AMOLED Plus display is bright, crisp, and has excellent viewing angles. When watching a high-quality trailer for *The Killer Elite* streamed from YouTube, we were impressed with the deep blacks and lack of pixelation in the darker scenes. Sadly, though, this handset's resolution of 800 x 480 is less than the Photon 4G's qHD (960 x 540) display.



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The single speaker on the back was quite loud for a smartphone. When playing movie clips or music, the Epic 4G Touch was more than loud enough for a few people grouped around the device, great for conference calls. However, the sound was slightly hollow when listening to music.

Keyboard

A large screen means more room for the virtual keyboard. We found typing in landscape mode to be nearly as fast as using a physical keyboard; the slight haptic feedback certainly helped. In portrait mode, we preferred using the Swype keyboard, which was equally accurate, if a bit slower.

Software and Interface

Riding on top of Android 2.3.4 is Samsung's TouchWiz interface. Aside from some handy widgets including a calendar, power manager (which lets you adjust wireless connections and brightness on the fly), and Active Applications, you get seven home screens. Pinching shows all of them at once. It's a little more simplistic than the Motoblur interface on the Photon 4G, but that's not necessarily a bad thing.



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Samsung includes some neat live panel widgets, such as Picture Frame, which rotates through your photo albums; AP Mobile, which shows the latest news

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stories, and AccuWeather.com (there's seven different clocks to choose from, too). Even better, they're resizable, so you can choose how much of a home screen a widget takes up.

Preinstalled third-part apps include Polaris Office for work and *N.O.V.A 2 HD* for play. The latter shooting game was fun and graphically rich, but we had to install a huge 392MB update first.

Samsung apps include Media Hub (where you can download movies and music) and Social Hub, which gathered our email, Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn updates in one place. AllShare let us stream multimedia content from the phone to a DLNA-enabled TV on the same Wi-Fi network. A Samsung Series 7000 plasma TV recognized the Epic 4G Touch almost instantly, and we had no trouble playing files on the big screen.

Sprint includes a bunch of its own apps, such as Sprint Hotspot, Sprint Nascar, Sprint ID, Sprint Mobile, Sprint Music Plus, Sprint Radio, Sprint TV & Movies, and Sprint Zone.

Performance

The Epic 4G Touch uses Samsung's new 1.2-GHz Samsung Exynos C210 processor, which proved to me one of the more powerful mobile processors on the market. On the CPU portion of the Benchmark test, the Epic 4G Touch scored 3164, slightly ahead of the Photon 4G (3,017), which uses a 1-GHz Nvidia Tegra 2 processor.

In An3dBench, which measures 3D graphics performance, the Epic 4G Touch scored 7,937, about 400 points higher than the Photon 4G (7,522), and about 2,000 points higher than the [HTC Evo Shift 4G](#) (5,984).

Whether it was plying games, or zooming in and out on web pages and pictures, the Epic 4G Touch was quick and responsive. Only once did we encounter a problem, when *N.O.V.A* crashed.

Web Browsing and 4G

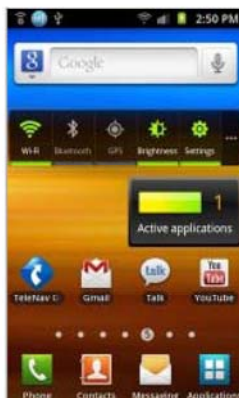
Another advantage of a large 4.5-inch screen is that you can see more of web pages, and you don't have to zoom in as far to read text. In portrait mode, we could fit most of Laptopmag.com on the screen. Tapping and holding the screen at two points and then tilting the phone forward or back let us zoom in and out of pages; it was smooth, but it's a gesture that will take some getting used to.

We had to wait several times for the buffer to load when watching a 1:39 high-quality trailer for *The Killer Elite*. When watching a clip from ESPN using the Sprint TV app, we also encountered a number of pauses as it buffered.

We were a bit disappointed with the Epic 4G Touch's 4G speeds. In Jersey City, download speeds averaged 4.3 Mbps and upload speeds averaged just 950.4 Kbps. In Manhattan, download rates were about the same (4.4 Mbps), but upload rates were an even lower 244 Kbps. While that's better than the Photon 4G (2.4 Mbps down average, 204 Kbs to 1.5 kbps up), the Evo Shift 4G's download rates were between 6.7 and 9.4 Mbps.

It took the Epic 4G Touch an average of 6-7 seconds to load the mobile sites of ESPN.com and NYTimes.com, and an average of 26 seconds to load the desktop version of Laptopmag.com.

We did like, though, that we didn't need to manually connect to a 4G network;



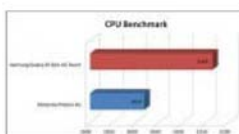
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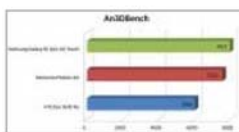
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TYPE	DATE	DOWNLOAD	UPLOAD	PING
4G	10/15/12	5089 kbps	212 kbps	117 ms
4G	10/15/12	5720 kbps	206 kbps	106 ms
4G	10/15/12	3716 kbps	297 kbps	126 ms
4G	10/15/12	3471 kbps	330 kbps	111 ms
4G	10/15/12	5686 kbps	267 kbps	162 ms
4G	10/15/12	3332 kbps	310 kbps	119 ms
4G	10/15/12	1503 kbps	55 kbps	149 ms

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the Epic 4G Touch automatically connected when using [data](#), and shuts off 4G when the connection isn't needed. The notification icon changed to "Zzz" when it's idle.

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The Epic 4G Touch can also be used as a hotspot for up to eight devices.

Video Chat

When video chatting over 4G with a colleague on the Galaxy Tab 10.1 LTE using Google Talk, he noted that our image was slightly blotchy, and audio a hair out of sync with video. Overall, though, the other caller said we came through clearly. However, the Epic 4G Touch had trouble staying connected to Sprint's 4G network in our Manhattan office. On a few occasions, the image froze.

Camera

Equipped with an 8-megapixel camera on the back, the Epic 4G Touch took some stunning photos. It did an excellent job at compensating for bright sunlight and dark shadows in the same frame. We also liked the customization options, such as anti-shake, auto contrast, effects (such as grayscale and Sepia), and metering. However, in a shot of flowers in a pot, the white flowers looked washed out. Even in pitch-black conditions, the LED flash next to the camera illuminated subjects well enough so that colors were nearly as accurate as in broad daylight.

Video, too, was quite good. A 1080p clip of a Manhattan streetcorner showed little in the way of jitteryness as traffic rolled by, and the yellow of the taxi cabs popped.



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Call Quality

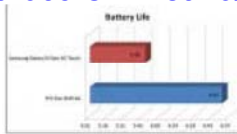
While holding the large Epic 4G Touch to our face felt a little awkward, callers said we sounded good, if a little flat. When we switched over to the 4G Touch's speakerphone, they remarked that they could barely tell the difference.

Battery Life

Samsung rates the Epic 4G Touch for up to 8.7 hours of talk time. The 1800 mAh battery in the device lasted 5:48 on the LAPTOP Battery Test (web surfing via 4G). That's about 15 minutes higher than the smartphone average (5:30) but more than an hour less than the HTC Evo Shift 4G (6:51).

Verdict

For those who like their screens big, the \$199 Samsung Galaxy II Epic 4G Touch should be at or near the top of your list. Paradoxically, it's both lighter and larger than the Photon 4G, although that phone has a crisper qHD display, world-roaming capabilities, and a slightly faster 4G connection. But it's hard to beat the Epic 4G Touch's superb camera, dual-core speed, and better overall screen quality. This is a phone you'll want to get your hands on--assuming your hand fits around it.



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