

Tech Talk

Samsung S6 ©

by John McCarthy



Hello and welcome once again to Tech Talk. Today, we're devoting our allotted time to perhaps the most profitable niche in the electronic consumer goods sector; indeed, the fastest-selling technology gadget in history. My guess is that most of the people listening in to a programme like Tech Talk will already own one. Smartphones, where competition has intensified and turned into a mouth-watering €200 billion market. The current forecast is that 2015 will see a staggering 1.35 billion new smartphones sold across the world.

Until recently, Samsung had been in the top spot since 2012, but this was recently relinquished to the amazingly successful Apple i-Phone 6 which, since its release in September last year, has helped Apple to break practically every sales record. However, it seems that Samsung might now have what it takes to turn the tide quickly back to its favour: namely, the company's spanking brand-new Galaxy S6 and S6 Edge, which have been hailed by the specialist press as easily the most visually striking phones to have emerged from South Korea in years. Both are set to launch in the very near future - April 10th - so while Tim Cook's company could well stay on top for another quarter or two, it seems more than likely that Samsung could steal back the crown later this year.

The question on everybody's lips is, of course, just how good is the new Galaxy S6? Well, the reviews are in, and generally the critical reaction to Samsung's radically overhauled new flagship model has been extremely positive, although of course one must always be wary of pre-launch hyperbole. Prior to the S6, users complained about the company's flimsy and somewhat tawdry plastic phones. In the early days it might have been acceptable, but when customers are paying hundreds of Euros, this was definitely a big negative point. All that has changed; there's practically no plastic on the S6, and the move to premium materials of aluminium and glass has been the big talking point in all the specialist press. Practically all who've tested the phone agree that it features a stunning design that manages to be streamlined, elegant and cutting-edge... terrific details that the discerning user will really appreciate.

Another major selling-point is the state-of-the-art screen. A 5.1 inch super AMOLED panel with quad HD resolution providing a whopping pixel density of 577 ppi. Many reviewers concur that it's the most impressive smartphone display to date: bright, vibrant, vivid colours with a flawless contrast. Samsung has certainly raised the bar here.

On the rear side you'll find the time-honoured camera lens with a flash and, just in case you've been totally overwhelmed by the experience of holding this 'objet d'art' in the palm of your hand, a heart rate monitor which is supposedly very accurate and quick to measure the pulse. Some will consider this somewhat gimmicky...

But getting back to the camera, reviewers have been waxing lyrical about this 16 Mega Pixel beauty. Improved optics, design and software, results in one of the best smartphone cameras to date... supposedly outshining even the iPhone. It includes a pro-mode which will give the user complete control over things like focal length, white balance, ISO, exposure etc, although of course it won't replace the DSLRs of real photography enthusiasts.

There are 56 pre-installed apps which should cater for most basic needs and tastes, and many of these are unique and original software additions. We don't really have time to go into these, but for the security-conscious among you, the S6 does include a fingerprint scanner in the home button at the bottom of the screen, and setup is apparently very similar to that of its deadly rival. There have,

however, been reports of bugs in the fingerprint sensors, but hopefully these are teething problems that will be sorted out before product launch.

In the hand, the Samsung S6 feels more high-end, more solid and more expensive than the company's previous phones. This is partly due to its unibody design, which does have a downside: you can't remove a back panel to change the battery. As if this weren't enough, they've also removed the memory card slot, which seems to me as a rather cynical and mean money-grabbing decision. Some customers will feel short-changed; a deal-breaker certainly, but probably for just a small minority. More importantly, this is something you'll have to take into serious consideration before ordering your 32, 64 or 128 Giga pre-installed storage, as you won't be able subsequently to add any more.

This is definitely the beginning of a new era for Samsung. One where perceived quality has become a defining criterion. It's not just a smartphone; it's also a very smart upgrade from their previous models which will put it up there with the iPhone in the desirability stakes. Naturally, this comes at a cost, and the S6 will be available for approximately 700 Euros... for that you get the entry model 32 Giga version, 800 Euros for 64 and an eye-watering 900 Euros for 128 Gigs. Despite this, I'm sure many will be breaking their piggybanks...