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PHONE FINDER

REVIEWS

# HTC Hero review: Born to rise

GSMarena team, 06 August 2009.

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2. Unboxing, 360-degree view, design and construction

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## Few surprises in the box

Much like the HTC Magic, the retail package of the HTC Hero is quite neatly shaped. As to contents, the essentials are well taken care of, with a few bonuses on top.

There's the mandatory charger and a miniUSB cable. There's no sign of the stylish white leather carrying pouch that shipped with the Magic (the Hero is a hard one to cut a suit for), but the 2GB microSD card is here alright.



Some nice stuff in the box, but no leather pouch this time

You also get quite a tasteful wired stereo handsfree - a one-piece kit - but if you want to listen to music on third-party headphones, the standard 3.5mm audio jack of the Hero says you're welcome. We guess you'd probably go for a third-party set anyways, as we're not quite content with the output of the Hero's own headphones.



The headset looks great and comes with music-enhanced remote but is not that good on the actual listening part

## HTC Hero 360-degree spin

The HTC Hero shares the rectangular design of the HTC Touch Diamond2 and has even borrowed the quite pleasant brushed aluminum front. It has an Android touch too keeping the angular chin of the T-Mobile G1. In a nutshell, we're pretty sold on the HTC Hero design, no doubt about that.

At 112 x 56.2 x 14.4 mm, the HTC Hero is not the most compact or the thinnest smartphone around, but it's sure to impress. The build quality is also near perfect.

The weight of 135 g is perhaps a notch above the class average but grants an extra solid feel in hand. For a sizeable touchscreen, the HTC Hero handles very comfortably, no issues for singlehanded thumbing around the interface. The trackball is comfortably raised too thanks to the chin.

## Design and construction

We quite like the angular bottom of the HTC Hero and we dare say the tilted chin looks even better on a handset that's notably thinner than the T-Mobile G1/HTC Dream. The Teflon coating said to cover the white variety of the Hero was quite intriguing too - we're usually quite a bored gang looking to get a thrill of something radically new.

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In the case of HTC Hero, the Teflon thingy certainly sounded like stuff worthy of a full page alone. Well, in reality the extra special new finish isn't all that fascinating.

It sure looks like premium matt plastic: almost rubbery to the touch providing excellent grip, but in the end it's plastic and that's that.

Whew, now that we've got it sorted (so much for the page or so), we can safely move on to the display frame, which, if you ask us, is as sleek as it gets. We can't really help but praise the fine brushed aluminum surface. Hopefully, we're not making some sort of fetish out of it, are we?



The brushed aluminum surface is an extra nice touch

Anyways that said, the central piece on the front is the touchscreen display as usual. The 65K-color capacitive touchscreen of HVGA resolution (320 x 480 pixels) is pretty much standard Android issue. Measuring 3.2 inches in diagonal as pretty much all other Android devices by HTC, the display pretty much meets all our requirements for sensitivity, colors, brightness and contrast.

As far as sunlight legibility is concerned, the HTC Hero fares just like the HTC Magic. It's close to the iPhone unmatched screen but is still more reflective and that can get in the way at times. Overall, the HTC displays used for Android phones seem way better than those on WinMo handsets.



The display is quite nice, but we wish for more variety in size

Below the display you'll find several hardware controls, the trackball taking charge of course. It's not so usual to find a trackball or a D-pad on a touchscreen device, but HTC and Android seem to be quite fond of that and we gotta admit they have a point.

You see, trackball navigation is certainly one of our favorites. It might not be as usable as a D-pad for gaming but at its full-time job it's quick, intuitive and pleasing. The trackball implementation on the HTC Hero is very good, quite on par with BlackBerry devices. Of course, it would've been even better to have adjustable trackball speed like on them Berries, but we're pushing it too far already.

The rest of the controls below the display are exactly the same as those on the HTC Magic, they're just arranged in a different fashion. We could've used a little larger keys and a wee bit more of press feedback, but they are hardly a deal-breaker.



The controls here are the same as on the other Android smartphones

If you're interested in Android, you probably already know what each of these keys does, but here's the rundown anyway.

The Menu key is usually used to unlock the screen and launch various context-dependent options across the interface, while the main menu itself is handled exclusively via the touchscreen.

The Home key always takes you to the main homescreen, while a press-and-hold opens the multitasking manager.

The Back button is self-explanatory, and so are the Send and End keys. Perhaps the only interesting thing here is the End key, which actually turns off the screen and locks it - it's also used to power the handset on and off.

The Search knob is an interesting thingy as there's hardly a similar key on competing smartphone platforms. Other than starting a Google search form for making hassle-free Google searches on the go, it also offers a variety of context dependent searches. It will search your contacts in the phonebook, mail messages and contacts, artists in the music library, even POI's on a map.

Continuing our tour around the Hero, the right-hand side is pretty bare. That is if you don't count the

microSD slot, which is there, but is hidden under the battery cover. You can still hot-swap cards if you need to, but you have to remove the cover every time.

The microSD card slot supports cards of up to 16 gigs and we found a 2GB card in our retail package (that of course can be market and carrier specific).

The thing we miss the most here on the right side is a dedicated camera key. Much like with the Magic and Touch Diamond 2, there's no shutter key here. Instead you use the Hero's trackball. As much as we like the trackball, it's hardly a handy shutter key as there's no way for it to accommodate half-press for autofocus. So, once you've framed and locked focus you can't skip the shot.



The right side of our Hero is bare, but a microSD slot hides under the armor

The left-hand part of the HTC Hero is also quite bare with the sole exception of the volume rocker. Much in contrast with the overly thin volume key on the Magic, the one here is big, and wobbly, and all plastic.



The volume key is on the left

As usual, on the bottom of the phone, you will see the standard miniUSB port used for plugging a charger, headset or a data cable.

On the top there's a nice surprise - the standard 3.5mm audio jack allows you to plug any standard set of headphones to enjoy your music.



The miniUSB port on the bottom and the 3.5mm audio jack on the top

The 5 megapixel camera is on the back - again there's no flash, LED or xenon, to boost low light performance. The camera doesn't have any lens cover either, so you better keep an eye on it or it will scratch in no time.



The camera hardly has any protection - not to mention a flash

Removing the plastic battery cover you can spot the 1350 mAh Li-Ion battery. The manufacturer claims up to 750 h of standby time and up to 7h of talk time - all in a 3G network. During the intensive testing of the phone for this review, we had to recharge daily, but that's hardly what you may consider "normal usage pattern".



The battery surely won't win any medals, but seems to last enough for a day full of torture

If you've paid attention so far, you'd already know that we're quite fond of the HTC Hero looks and we find its construction solid enough and generally quite suiting its high-end status. The Hero is hardly the slimmest phone around, yet its size is not a burden and the hand feel is great. The nudge at the bottom gives it a charm of its own, plus the handset shapes quite naturally and comfortably around

your face while talking.



The Hero surely does look and feel the part

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