

Exhibit 68

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Sony Ericsson Xperia Arc S Review

The original Sony Ericsson Xperia Arc launched in 2011 with much hype and fanfare, and it impressed me last year when I reviewed it – I gave it a solid 3/5. Despite my initial concerns that it was a phone that put style over substance, I applauded its display, camera and good call quality. Sony Ericsson have taken Apple's cue in releasing an updated phone with a suffixed 'S'. However, with the release of the Galaxy Nexus and Android 4.0 since the Arc's original outing, the competition has moved on a remarkable degree in just a year. Does the refreshed Arc S do enough to keep up or does it get left behind?

Similar.... but different.....

The original Arc was certainly good looking phone when we first came across it last year. The danger with phones with unique, fashionable curves and lines is that, well, fashions change. I'm reviewing the white version of the phone, and I was surprised at how good it still looks. The white colouring was good enough of a new paint job to make the phone's looks feel fresh again. I actually think it looks great. The huge 4.2 inch display, when powered off, contrasts sharply with the white and creates an oddly retro-futuristic look which is great on the eye. It retains the chrome lining on the sides.

As the physical dimensions (125 x 63 x 8.7 mm) and design haven't changed, it's still as surprisingly comfortable to hold as its predecessor – the concave arching over the palm of the hand to rest nicely on the hand with a nice balanced weight of 117g. One thing I wished Sony Ericsson had changed was the choice of materials. It still feels as plastic as its younger brother.

Yes, the build quality is fine – the lack of creaking while squeezing the phone is testament to that – but the materials don't feel great.

Had the phone been made out of higher quality materials, it could have laid claim to truly being a premium phone. As it is, it remains a phone that you'll want your friends to look at, but probably not touch





The 480 x 854 4.2 inch LCD Bravia display impresses with its vibrancy and colour saturation. It's a great size, and when viewed head-on is an impressive display. Disappointingly the viewing angles are poor – even at a slight angle colours wash out. Re-reading my review of the original Arc, it didn't appear that the original's display washed out so easily. Indeed, I wrote that colours only washed out at 160 degrees, whereas the Arc S's display seems to wash out at a much narrower 120 degrees. Not sure what SE have done to change this, but the Arc S's screen seems a bit weaker than its predecessor's.

The Arc S's O/S is Android Gingerbread v 2.3.4, overlaid with SE's Timescape UI. I thought Timescape was dated last year and so you can imagine, a year on, my thoughts on it - especially compared to the current high bar set by the sleek sexiness of Android 4.0. Nothing much has changed at all with respect to Timescape.

The processor has been upgraded to 1.4 GHz, which isn't heaps and bounds above the 1 GHz on the original. Certainly it's not enough of a bump up to have any noticeable effect compared to the Arc – which, to be fair, was no slouch itself.

Something which Sony Ericsson appear to have rectified is the keyboard. I was dissatisfied with the SE keyboard on the original Arc to the extent that I quickly downloaded an Android Market replacement. I was expecting no change in this regard – when first booting up the Arc S I was already thinking of the keyboard replacement I was going to immediately download. But, you know what? For some reason, the SE keyboard on the Arc S was not bad at all. I still think there are better Market alternatives but I used it for about a week without being frustrated...

The phone still has the 3 hardware Android buttons (losing the Search button from the standard Android four-button set up) which I liked. Again, due to the size of the screen they are extremely close to the bottom of the phone, which can occasionally call for some seriously awkward finger gymnastics. Still, the fact that they are hardware key means that you can be sure when you've pressed them.

One massive thing that Sony Ericsson omitted to change from the original, is probably the smallest physical feature on the phone, yet has a huge impact on usability. For reasons that appear purely for style over usability, the Arc S's power/lock button is tiny, located on the top left of the device. Locking the phone quickly can prove to be annoying, given its small size, and also the difficulty in pressing it once located by touch. It sounds like I'm being pedantic, but just count the number of times you lock your phone over the course of a day.

From what I could see, there was no difference in call quality between the Arc S and its older brother – still very good and no issues to note here.



One strength that the Arc S has inherited from its predecessor is the excellent camera. It's still got an 8 MP sensor with LED flash and autofocus, producing excellent stills with good colour reproduction. Also, the camera shutter works quickly, enabling to snap and snap in quick succession without much delay at all.

At 720p, the video capture produces decent HD videos, although the output isn't as sharp as it could be. What I did like was the functional autofocus which worked very well (see video right), effortlessly focusing near and far with some excellent macro focusing.

It also retains the Arc's ability to crop a video – useful for quick Youtube uploads.

Click to watch the same video in full screen HD on our Youtube channel:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6lBvW8H64-8&feature=channel_video_title

Conclusion

Given the high benchmark the cutting edge Android phones have set recently, I was honestly not expecting very much from the Arc S. Although I liked its predecessor, I initially thought that the combination of the minor technical upgrades with an un-evolved Timescape UI would leave the Arc S eating its competition's dust before it was even released.

I did, however, quite enjoy *using* the Arc S. There's something quite likeable about it and there have been some crucial improvements to the camera and the keyboard, although the screen seems to have taken a slight step back with its poorer viewing angles.

Please Sony Ericsson (now just Sony...), please use some premium materials on your next Arc/Xperia handset (as well as vanilla Android, please). Then, maybe the wider market might consider the Arc/Xperia line as a genuine competitor to the high end handsets out there.

As it is, the Arc S is a decent, useable and likeable upgrade. Not bad.

Rating: 3.5/5

