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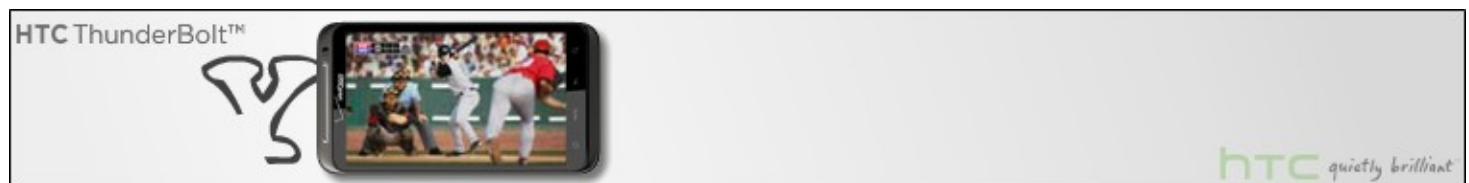
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JUNE 8, 2009 7:00 PM PDT

# iPhone 3G S First Take

by [Kent German](#)

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*Editor's note: This First Take includes only the features that will be unique to the iPhone 3G S. I've revisited [iPhone OS 3.0 in a separate post.](#)*

[iPhone](#) fans got what they were waiting for June 8 when the third-generation model of Apple's popular handset made its debut during the [WWDC 2009 keynote](#). The iPhone 3G S, which will hit

stores June 19, promises a faster iPhone with an extended battery life, more memory, and improved features. It looks exactly the same as the previous model, but both the 16GB (\$199) and new 32GB (\$299) models will come in white and black versions.

Though the jump from the [iPhone 3G](#) to the 3G S isn't quite as big as the jump from the [first-](#) to second-generation models, this latest handset still adds enough new features to make it a compelling upgrade for some users. And

when you add in all the new features that will come with the [iPhone OS 3.0](#) (available June 17), we finally get an iPhone that can run thousands of snazzy applications *and* do something as basic as send a multimedia message.

Yet, we still have some concerns. A faster AT&T 3G network isn't going to happen overnight, and some features, like tethering and the aforementioned [multimedia messaging](#), won't happen right away. We also came away from the keynote without any mention of call quality, which, as any iPhone owner can tell you, remains far from perfect. But most importantly, the iPhone 3G S's price will vary widely depending on your eligibility. If you can get it at the lowest prices, it's worth your while. But if you're not yet eligible for a discounted upgrade, we suggest that you wait.

## WWDC 2009: Apple unveils iPhone 3G S



iPhone 3G S

(Credit: Apple)

### Speed

Phil Schiller, Apple's senior vice president of worldwide product marketing, promised that iPhone 3G S (the "S" stand for speed) will be faster in a number of ways. Not only will a new processor enable it to load apps faster, but it will also utilize an upgraded AT&T 3G network for speedier Web browsing. We expected both of these improvements, so we're not surprised that they are the new model's prime selling points. I'll start with the processor.

Schiller didn't provide any hard metrics on the new processor, but he said that the 3G S would open applications two times faster than the previous two iPhones. Honestly, this isn't something that we've been pining for--we would much prefer

to get [Palm Pre](#)-style multitasking--but we'll welcome it just the same. We'll have to wait for a review model to see how much faster the 3G S is.

On the other hand, we've eagerly been awaiting zippier 3G speeds, so we're glad to hear that they're on their way. Here, too, Schiller was short on specifics outside of mentioning AT&T's forthcoming [HSPA network upgrade](#) to 7.2Mbps. That is an important qualifier considering that AT&T won't start rolling out the faster network until later this year. What's more, full deployment is scheduled for 2011. Though we expect that urban areas will be first, coverage will vary widely for the next year, at least. As such, we don't predict any miracles soon.

## Battery life

Though battery life on the first [iPhone](#) was mostly satisfactory, the [iPhone 3G](#) sucks up juice rapidly. Indeed, you're lucky if your handset lasts longer than a day of heavy use. Luckily, the iPhone 3G S offers some hope. Schiller rattled off statistics that certainly sound promising. It should offer 9 hours of Wi-Fi battery life, 10 hours on video playback, 30 hours on audio playback, 12 hours 2G talk time, and 5 hours 3G talk time. Like with the processor, we'll have to wait for our review unit to see if these ratings hold up, but we like what we're hearing so far.



You can trim video clips right on the iPhone.

(Credit: Apple)

## Camera

Up until now, the iPhone's camera has been good, but far from great. Though picture quality is decent, camera editing features on the first two iPhones are nonexistent. The minimalist shooters bothered us so much that we began to worry if Apple was leading a new trend of "dumbing down" cell phone cameras.

The iPhone 3G S, however, has helped put some of those fears to rest. Apple boosted the camera's resolution to 3 megapixels and it added an autofocus feature. In the future, you'll also get settings for white balance, exposure, low-light sensitivity, and a macro mode for close-up photos. The autofocus feature appeared to work well during the keynote so we're looking forward to testing it ourselves.

## Video recording

When we last asked about video recording at the [OS 3.0 announcement](#) in March, Apple wouldn't comment on whether it would come to the iPhone. So we have to admit that we weren't expecting it to happen anytime soon. But thanks to its [improved camera](#), the iPhone 3G S will offer the ability to record VGA clips at 30 frames per second. It also promises a nifty editing feature that will let



Use voice control to make calls and play songs.

(Credit: Apple)

you trim clips to your liking. And once you're done, you can upload them to YouTube with just a couple of clicks. Again, it looked good onstage so we're excited to check it out.

### Voice Control

We've long berated Apple for not including voice dialing on the iPhone. So when we heard that it would be on the iPhone 3G S, our initial reaction was a cynical "it's about time." Yet, our hearts softened just the slightest bit when we saw that the new Voice Control feature will go far beyond just voice dialing and commands.

Sure, you'll be able to dial a contact using your voice, but you'll also be able to activate the iPod player by asking for a particular music track or artist. What's more, you can use Voice Control to identify a song by name and you can ask to play related tracks (as they're associated in the iTunes Genius feature). Seeing those additional features almost makes us forgive Apple for taking so long to add something as basic as voice dialing, but not quite.

### Compass

We were a little skeptical when [we heard](#) that the new iPhone might offer a digital compass. Yet, Schiller confirmed that the rumors were true. Like any other compass it will automatically point to north, but it also will integrate with Google Maps to point you in the right direction. A nice touch, to be sure.



Find your way with the digital compass.

(Credit: Apple)

### What didn't we get?

Fortunately, this list is getting shorter with each incarnation of the iPhone. Though OS 3.0 adds many notable missing features like multimedia messaging, turn-by-turn directions and stereo Bluetooth, there are a few capabilities still lacking. Flash support for the Safari browser, app folders for the home screen and USB mass storage are just a few. And hey, though we know that we'll never get it, we'll throw in a user-replaceable battery too.

### So should you buy it?

Like we said earlier, the iPhone 3G S offers some notable feature improvements, but it doesn't offer quite the same leap that the iPhone 3G offered over the first-generation model. If you don't own an iPhone yet, and you've been waiting around to see what happens, now is the time to go for it. The same goes for iPhone Classic owners who never made the jump to the iPhone 3G.

But, if you're a current iPhone 3G owner, the answer isn't so clear. If you're eligible to upgrade at the cheaper prices (\$199 or \$299), then we suggest doing so, as long as you remember that a new two-year contract is required. If you own an iPhone 3G, but are not eligible for the upgrade yet, then we recommend waiting. As much as the iPhone 3G S brings, it's not worth the [extra \\$200](#) that both the 16GB and 32GB models will cost you. In the meantime, you will get the new OS 3.0 features when they're released for the iPhone 3G on June 17. But not only that, you'll have extra money to spend on apps.

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Kent German is a section editor for mobile device reviews at CNET. When he's not testing the newest handsets on the market, he's blogging about wireless news, appearing on the Dialed In podcast and watching planes land at the airport (yes, really). In his On Call column, he answers reader questions and gives his take on the rapidly changing mobile industry.

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