

First look: RED Hydrogen One hopes holographic screen can lure people from Apple, Samsung

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The arrow flying off the screen was coming straight for us, and had we not known better we might have ducked. We were watching a scene from Disney Pixar's "Brave" in 3-D, or something very much like it, and we were doing so without wearing any funky glasses. And the display in front of us wasn't at the neighborhood multiplex but rather on an oversized smartphone.

We were getting a first look at the Hydrogen One from RED, an ambitious—and pricey—new "holographic" smartphone that launches Nov. 2 in both AT&T and Verizon stores. It costs \$1,295 for an aluminum model and a whopping \$1,595 for the titanium model that is coming later.

Known for the professional cameras developed by founder Jim Jannard, RED has built a stellar reputation around high-end cinematography, the likes of which are in wide use in Hollywood.

RED's technology is at the core of the new [phone](#).

Give me the specs

The device has a 5.7-inch high-resolution display, Qualcomm Snapdragon 835 processor, dual 8-megapixel front cameras and 12-megapixel rear cameras. It even has a headphone jack.

But you're not reading about the device because of (more or less) state-of-the-art specs. It doesn't have wireless charging and is not as water-resistant as a recent iPhone, Galaxy or Google Pixel.

What sets it apart from Apple and Samsung is its holographic technology, or what RED refers to as "4-View" display.

Keep your expectations in check.

"It is not Princess Leia dancing off the table. It's also not the hologram on your credit card. It is in between," Jannard said in an interview with USA TODAY. Based on our initial first impressions, that's probably a fair assessment.

But will there be anything to watch?

RED is partnering with Warner Bros. to bring 10 to 15 titles to the device at launch. AT&T, which now owns Warner Bros. as a result of its recent purchase of Time Warner, will be including "Ready Player One" and "Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them" in 4-View at no extra cost for those who purchase the phone from the carrier. Pricing of other 4-View optimized films hasn't been revealed, though users will be able to buy the content right from the phone.

Disney is also on board to provide 4-View content, though it is not known which titles will be available immediately nor how much they will cost.

The content from the studios that can be watched in 4-View must start in 3-D before RED converts them into the format the phone can recognize.

RED also says 20 or so 4-View-capable games will be available at launch, some of which are free.

You can view all conventional 2-D content normally, without any visible degradation, at least based on our limited time with the device.

What's more, you can use the camera on the phone to shoot your own content in 4-View, which can be shared in that format with another RED phone, or as a standard JPEG file if you are posting it online or sending it to a friend who doesn't have the Hydrogen One.

What else does it have that my iPhone or Galaxy doesn't?

RED will also be incorporating the company's modular system for adding accessories, something companies such as Motorola, Essential and LG have tried without much success.

RED's first accessory "mod," coming next year, promises a high-end sensor that will transform the phone into one of RED's studio-quality shooters. Jannard says you'll be able to attach traditional zoom lenses for shooting higher-quality photos and videos.

A future mod will allow users to record audio in 3-D as well, taking advantage of the phone's other notable feature: A3D spatial audio, with impressive surround-like effects like those you've come to expect in a movie theater.

When we slipped on headphones, we were treated to a demonstration that made it sound and almost feel like we were sitting in a chair getting a haircut, with the barber circling our heads with his razor and clippers.

Should I ditch my current phone for this one?

RED obviously faces numerous challenges persuading buyers, aside

from the lofty price. It has to put the phones in front of potential users who can then try out the devices to experience the technology for themselves. That's why, of course, the kind of prominent space and treatment they do end up getting in AT&T and Verizon retail stores will become critical.

Phones and TVs with 3-D displays have existed before but never taken off largely because both the quality and content were lacking.

Jannard recognizes this is going to be a long battle and doesn't expect to find success overnight. "People ask me what the hell were you thinking building a cellphone," he said during an event to show off the phone in New York.

Jannard believes he'll be "hugely successful" if his company captures just "one half of 1 percent" of Samsung's unit sales. He said much the same in building Oakley when it was chasing Ray-Ban in the sunglasses market. How'd that work out? Jannard eventually sold to Ray-Ban parent Luxottica for \$2.1 billion in 2007.

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