

Galaxy Fold review: Should you pay \$2,000 for Samsung's delayed folding phone tablet?

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Samsung's new \$1,980 Galaxy Fold has been making waves over the last two weeks, not necessarily for all the right reasons.

And now the arrival of Samsung's foldable hybrid—a cross between a thick smartphone and iPad Mini-sized tablet—has been delayed until at least next month, in the aftermath of screen damage and busted phones reported by early reviewers.

Ahead of such problems, the phone drew plenty of hype and buzz for its [innovative design](#), not to mention its near \$2,000 price.

At Samsung's request, we are returning our review unit Tuesday, but USA TODAY's Ed Baig and Eli Blumenthal have been messing around with the device for the last week.

Here's what we experienced, and what you need to know to get caught up on the news.

The latest news

What's going on with the delay?

The saga that led to the delay began after reviewers from CNBC, The Verge, Bloomberg as well as influential YouTuber Marques Brownlee, who (like USA TODAY) were among those given pre-release test units, reported screen damage that broke the Fold.

The display on the unit given to CNBC, for example, flickered uncontrollably causing the device to turn off and completely malfunction.

The Verge said its unit developed "a bulge that appeared to be the result of something in between the screen and the hinge."

Other problems surfaced after testers peeled off what appeared to be a protective film on the screen, that was, in fact, not meant to be removed,

though Samsung didn't do a good enough job of communicating this point in its packaging handed to reviewers.

Samsung began an investigation that is still going on.

Meanwhile, if you already pre-ordered the Fold you can cancel at any time, Samsung says. You haven't been charged yet anyway since the phone hasn't shipped.

Is our test phone broken?

Our test unit, a European variant of the Fold, worked fine after a week of use. The phone still opened and closed as it initially did, with the protective layer on the tablet screen still intact and functioning.

Our use, thus far

Favorite feature?

Ed Baig: Putting aside the issues some have experienced with the 7.3-inch tablet display—and frankly that's hard to do now, given the delay and all—it has to be the way this thing folds. That is quite a technological achievement.

I'm not even put off by the line that is sometimes visible on the screen, depending on the angle you are looking at or what background is on the display. The size is ideal for watching video or reading an eBook, and even in its open state holdable with one-hand, though true one-handed operation is reserved for when the phone is closed and when you're relying on the outside display, to check on a text or take a selfie.

Eli Blumenthal: I still am impressed with the overall usefulness of the foldable screen. I use my phone as my main television and the ability to

just open up the phone in bed and watch the NBA playoffs on a big screen without grabbing a tablet or television remote worked surprisingly well.

Biggest gripe?

Eli: The front "phone" screen on the Fold is really bad. While 4.6-inches, the screen is very narrow, making it hard to type, watch videos with, take pictures on or just generally use beyond a few simple tasks. You can't even use the front screen horizontally to type text messages or browse Chrome in landscape mode.

Maps, making calls and controlling music are all fine, but this front seems to exist as just a way to get people to open the larger tablet. The good thing is that tablet experience does work so well.

I'm going to go one step further and give a "runner up" gripe to the fingerprint sensor on the side. This didn't work well for me when the phone was closed and was even more difficult to use when the Fold was opened.

Also a nearly \$2,000 phone that isn't water-resistant in 2019? Hard pass.

Ed: I agree on all of the above. Let me mention another: the fact that this phone doesn't have 5G. Granted, these are the earliest days for the rollout of the next generation of mobile wireless. But if you're going to spend nearly two-grand on a device like this, you'd want it to be 5G-ready.

Even if Samsung in a year or whatever comes out with a 5G version and an attractive trade-in option, I'm just not paying that much in the interim for a device that in some respects is half-baked.

While I'm at it, let me also complain about the removal of your standard-sized headphone jack, though Samsung, of course, isn't exactly alone with this complaint. (I'm looking at you Apple.)

Eli: Both valid points, though Samsung does include a pair of its otherwise \$129 Galaxy Buds in the box with the Fold. They do get points there.

Ed: I'll give you that, though I sometimes still prefer to use better, corded headphones.

Any surprise?

Eli: While Samsung has plenty of work to do in fixing up the Fold's screen problems, I have been pleasantly surprised by how polished the software is. Samsung is not known for its software prowess (see: Bixby, the company's Siri/Alexa/Google Assistant rival) but kudos to Samsung and Google for making the phone work, for the most part, really well. Apps transitioned quickly between the two displays, games played smoothly and multi-tasking worked.

I had some issues with certain apps playing videos simultaneously in multitasking mode (turning the tablet into a quasi-"sports bar," if you will), but things mostly worked well.

Ed: One positive for sure seemed to be battery life, which you'd ordinarily wonder about on a device of this size with two screens. It has a dual battery system that works in tandem. And while I didn't conduct any formal kind of battery test, the Fold appeared to have plenty of juice even after a full day of mixed use.

Where do you see this tech going forward?

Ed: I think foldable designs have a world of potential and are here to stay in one manner or another. Having said that, though, "screen-gate" certainly represents a step back not only for Samsung but for the entire foldable market.

Of course, the expectation is none of the early foldable phones would be perfect—these are, after all, version 1.0 devices that you'd expect to improve dramatically in their next iterations and beyond.

Still, there are several interesting developments in the foldable space. One device to watch is a rumored foldable Razr phone from Lenovo-owned Motorola.

And another is Huawei's Mate X, which turned heads recently at the MWC trade show in Barcelona. It faces two big and possibly insurmountable problems. For one thing, if you think Samsung's phone is pricey, Huawei's device would cost about \$2,600. Then there's the matter of whether such a phone could even be released in the States anytime soon given the political football over whether Huawei is an agent of espionage for China, something the company has strongly denied.

Eli: Agreed, though again, I'm still impressed at how far along Samsung has gotten with proving this concept. The problems make it very, very clear that the company has a lot of work to do before anyone should think about buying this device, but you can't discount the potential for this technology to influence the future of phones and computing.

What's does this mean for Samsung?

Ed: Nothing good. Remember, Samsung is a company that, within our collective memory, had to withstand another PR firestorm over the Galaxy Note 7, which had batteries that caught fire, leading to three separate recalls. It cost Samsung billions of dollars and made it a

punchline.

To its credit, Samsung recovered from the Note 7 and presumably can get past this crisis as well.

But this surely doesn't help and how Samsung manages the eventual release of the phone will be telling.

Eli: A big save for Samsung is the fact that this phone is not yet in the hands of the public. One can only imagine what they would've had to deal with if the Fold was already released.

That's not to excuse this—the press should not be a way to test whether your product works—but from a PR standpoint, this type of crisis is a black-eye, not a knockout punch. Companies, including Samsung as you mentioned, have dealt with far worse and recovered just fine.

If Samsung does fix the Fold I do think people will quickly forget all about this issue the same way they have with delays of other failed product launches in the past.

Worth the price?

Eli: The more I use this phone, the more I'm reminded of the first iPhone in 2007. High price, limited or missing features, bulky size and questionable design decisions (remember Apple's recessed headphone jack?). Even with all that, though, you could see the potential.

As you've mentioned, this is very much a first-generation product. And as we've discussed, there are plenty of important issues Samsung needs to work out.

At \$1,980, no one, except people who need to have the latest and

greatest, should buy this [phone](#) as their main device. But like with the original iPhone, I'm still bullish on where this goes next.

Ed: I believe in its potential too. The design is impressive and so is the underlying technology. But even if Samsung didn't have screen problems, I'm not buying, I just can't justify spending anywhere near this much.

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