

Pricey Samsung Galaxy Note 10 Plus does terrific video, at a cost

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At a whopping 6.8 inches, if the Samsung Galaxy Note 10 Plus isn't the world's biggest smartphone, we haven't found another like it.

The Note 10 Plus is Samsung's biggest ever and one of three new Notes, the flagship "phablet" for people who like bigger phones, with the ability to use a pen for typing and doodling.

The good news: Walking around with it doesn't feel overwhelming at all,

like having an iPad in your pocket, as it's just a hair larger than the 6.4-inch Galaxy S10 Plus released earlier this year, and the top of the line iPhone, the 6.5-inch iPhone XS Max.

It fit into my jeans pocket easily. Women may have an issue in their purses, but really, it's just marginally larger than other phones.

The Note 10 Plus touts stronger power, improved video and audio and a whole bunch of gimmicky features most readers won't be bothered with. There's also the sky-high price of \$949 for the 6.3-inch version or \$1,099 for the 6.8-inch Note Plus that I reviewed. The 5G version is \$1,299. The phones will be in stores on Friday.

The Note 10 Plus is a beautiful phone, but I can't justify the high expense, especially when you can pick up the slightly smaller S10 Plus, which is almost the same, for \$799. The new Note is missing one key feature: a headphone jack. And for buyers of the entry-level Note 10, there's no microSD card expansion slot.

That said, let's go down some of the new features.

If you're a photo nerd like me, you'll love the new Note for the three main camera lenses, as opposed to two on most phones, for ultra-wide, wide and medium portrait 2X zoom. The ultra-wide is pretty distorted, but it does help fit more people into your group shot.

For video, Samsung has added "Portrait" mode tools, the ability to blur the background, like we do on photos on iPhones and recent Galaxy models. It also is promoting "zoom in audio" for sound. This is a tool to dramatically improve the audio of your video, which on smartphones have historically been very poor, with microphones that pick up everything as your subject speaks—including street noise, rustling in the background, you name it.

The portrait feature, called Live Focus Video, is nice; but in my tests, the effect wasn't that different from what I got in regular video mode. Both looked great. For the zoom in audio, I wanted to love it, as a savior to all those poor audio tracks I've received over the years. But alas, it was no different.

I had a colleague turn on the TV and talk to me at the same time, and the zoom in mic did not isolate his voice one bit or push the sound of the TV into the way background.

Another video feature is improved image stabilization, which I like, a lot. I did a walking test, which is always a good thing to try, to see if the image bounced up and down as I took my steps. It did, but a little gentler than I've seen on, say, the iPhone.

Overall, the videos look great. They are steady, sharp, exposed correctly and high resolution. I even tried doing a time-lapse, handheld, taking advantage of the improved steadiness, and the shot looks like it was done on a tripod.

I shot one scene on my main camera, a Sony, that was in three different lighting situations, and it was frustrating because it couldn't get them all right, quickly. I switched to the Note 10 Plus, and the problem was solved.

Consider me impressed.

That said, for photos, the shutter button was occasionally unresponsive and frustrating. That is, until I learned a few secrets. You could snap a shot by hitting the volume knob or using the S pen.

Now, let's dive into the gimmicks.

—AR Doodle lets you draw things with the Note S Pen onto homemade videos, like, say, putting a mustache on someone. It's fun the first time, but...well, maybe your kids will enjoy this.

—Convert to text. You can write something in cursive, via the Pen, and have the Note convert it to written text. You can even move it to Microsoft Word. Question: Why? It's nice to have the pen as an alternative to endless typing, but the only thing I want to write in cursive would be a signature. Am I missing something?

—Quick Measure lets you take a picture of something and determine the width. Fun, but this just seems like another feature that's not going to be used very much,

Battery life is terrific. It just went on and on without missing a beat.

Overall, with the big beautiful screen, everything looks better on the Note 10 Plus, from YouTube and Netflix videos to homemade ones, photos and even web surfing.

But is that worth \$1,100 to you?

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