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Motorola RIZR Z8 Review

'Bend it like Beckham'

Motorola RIZR Z8 has been quietly launched by the US-based company in September 2007, just after it was showcased at 3GSM Congress in Barcelona in February. Initially named Motorola RIZER Z8 or MOTORIZR Z8, the device has been thrown on the mobile market with an easier to remember name RIZR Z8. This is the first Motorola handset available on the market that features Symbian operating system, so you might consider it a prototype. Even so, being the first of its kind should have made the manufacturer test it thoroughly, as the slider seem to have serious software issues. The weird (in a good way) design and the RAZR-like keypad layout convinced many fans of the brand to buy it without even thinking. Unfortunately, only after using it a couple of days they realized that the phone is full of bugs and the Symbian OS has been defectively ported on the device. Most of them replaced it with other models, or even other brands, but the main blow was given by Vodafone UK, which secretly decided to withdraw the whole lot of Motorola's RIZR Z8 from the market because of the high number of returns. Announced in February 2007 at the 3GSM Congress in Barcelona, Motorola RIZR Z8 has been made available on the market in September 2007. At the moment, anyone interested in buying Motorola's slider must pay between USD 500-600\$, depending on the location. **Design** Also named the 'kicker slider', Motorola RIZR Z8 features one the weirdest designs that you could ever see to a slider handset. In fact I believe that the name 'curved slider' would've been more appropriate, as the handset looks very much like a 'banana phone'. If you still don't know what's a 'banana phone', just remember what phone Keanu Reeves uses in first part of the Matrix trilogy or simply check out our pictures. Overall, Motorola's Z8 looks pretty cool, different from most sliders. It is made of rubberized compound which makes it very stable when is put on different different kinds of surfaces (glass, wood, plastic). The phone looks sturdy, ergonomic (109 x 50 x 15 mm) and average in weight (112 grams including battery). The only trouble I had when first using it was the fact that I didn't know where to put the SIM card. The phone has an awkward mechanism that opens very hard, especially if you have sweaty fingers. In fact, you can't open the back plastic cover under the camera, unless your hands are dry, as the plug's surface is perfectly smooth. Fortunately, the microSD slot card hasn't been placed in the same compartment, otherwise it would've been a pain to pull it out too frequently. Anyway, the slider features the SIM card hot-swap ability, which enables the user to change the SIM card without powering off the device. The handset still requires reboot, but the fact that you're not forced to pull out the battery to change the SIM card is more than welcomed. The front part of the slider is entirely covered by a thick glass that protects the screen and external keypad. This is probably the main reason why the external keys are so hard to press. Upside the large display, one can notice the Motorola logo, a very small light sensor, the in-call speaker and the secondary VGA videocall camera. Under the screen you'll hardly notice a small thumb-grip, which seems to be used for sliding up the handset. This would've reduced drastically the number of fingerprints on the screen, but the little thumb-grip fails its purpose as it's very unhandy to use. The external keys are used to navigate the menu without sliding up the phone, but they are hard to use. Either because they're covered by a slim protective glass or they're simply low responsive. The 5-way navigational key is a little bit better because it has the advantage of size and is a little bit easier to press it. Under the keypad, Motorola placed a very big external speakerphone placed under a grid-like layout. The right side of the slider includes a special button that opens up the Gallery, a camera button and a miniUSB port covered by a rubber stripe. On the left side you can notice the microSD slot card, the dual volume key and the smart-key.

The back of the phone embeds a 2 Megapixel camera with flash. Also you should be aware that the smooth plug on the left of the camera can be pulled out to reveal the SIM card slot. Opposite you'll be able to pull out the whole right hood so you can have access to the battery; no troubles in getting this out. Sliding it up will truly reveal the 'WOW factor' of the phone, as it awkwardly bends to fit the human face. The internal keypad is even harder to use than the external one. The spaces between the keys have been marked by plastic grips, while the keys themselves have been also made from the same plastic alloy. Because the phone bends when slid up, the main keypad compartment has a concave form factor. Apart from the fact that the keypad is low responsive and very hard to press, the concave form makes it even harder to use. Don't get me wrong, the phone's design is really interesting, but the choices made by Motorola are not that user-friendly as hoped. Anyway, one of the positive things about it is the green backlighting, which makes the phone look very refreshing and exotic. Overall, the phone looks simple, but stylish just the way a man would want to be. Most certainly men are the main target of the phone, especially because of the bulky design and the weird form.

Display and Camera Motorola RIZR Z8 embeds one of the best TFT (240 x 320 pixels) displays found on the market, which is also the first to feature 16M colors support. It might look strange, but Motorola hasn't been able to include such a powerful display onto older models and Z8 is the first to get this kind of screen. And this is not all, the slider is also equipped with a built-in accelerator 2D/3D graphics PowerVR, which greatly improves any gaming experience. Benchmarks revealed results that are almost on par with Nokia's E90, that features a much larger display (800 x 352 pixels), but the same number of colors support – 16 Million. The quality of the image is astonishing, colors are very well defined making the contrast extremely vivid. The only thing I didn't like was the brightness of the screen, which is a little bit lower than normal, especially outdoors (even with the settings at max). The 2 Megapixel camera found on the back of the slider features flash and 8x digital zoom, but lacks any autofocus capabilities. The flash may look small, but is powerful enough to enable the user to get the best from a night picture. The module can be started by simply pressing the Camera small green button found on the right side of the slider. Unfortunately, the preview of the picture cannot be seen in full screen (don't know why), but you'll get used to it in the end. If you don't slide up the phone and keep it closed, when you press the camera button you'll be using the main camera on the back of the slider. The moment you slide up the device you'll be able to make snapshots by using the secondary VGA camera – mainly used for videocalls. There's a unusual (for a 2 Megapixel camera) large number of predefined settings that the user can benefit from. Starting with the White balance (Daylight, Cloudy, Tungsten, Fluorescent, Flash), Effects (Black & White, Negative, Sepia, Solarize), various Modes (Indoor, Outdoor, Sports, Portrait, Night, Backlight) and Sharpness, all offer different stances of the snapshots a user wants to get. As seen in the sample pictures, quality is above average, almost very good for a 2 Megapixel camera. Still, the module camera is a little bit sluggish, which means that it takes a longer time to process the picture you've just taken. It is also highly dependent on light conditions and tends to lack sharpness and sometimes it will blur the objective.

Menu and Software Motorola RIZR Z8 is based on Symbian v9.2 operating system featuring UIQ 3.1. Unfortunately, those already familiarized with the above mentioned OS will find that Z8 doesn't look the same at all. On the contrary, initially developed to be used with a touch-screen, Z8's operating system and interface is one of the hardest to understand and handle. The main screen can be fitted with different plug-ins, which enable quick access to various functions of the phone (Calls, Emails, Messages, Calendar, Profiles, Music player). The main menu can be accessed from the Home key on the external keypad and looks very much like a usual Nokia handset featuring Symbian OS. The difference is that most of the applications you decide to install will go right here and not in any predefined folder like Applications or Games. Still, Motorola offered users the possibility of creating folders directly in the Main menu of the phone, so they can insert any software they already installed. The slider features a bunch of useful applications

specific to any Symbian OS handset. Agenda is one of these applications, which is in fact the Calendar application found in most handsets, only that this one is more complex. All data can be synchronized and transferred to PC through the miniUSB cable connection. There's also a To-do list application, World time, Alarm (only 3 possible), Calculator (basic), Jotter (a simple notepad that enables user to make and read .txt files), File manager and Opera 8.65 browser for Symbian. There's no Word/Excel application included and most likely you won't find 3rd party software to work with the Z8. This seems to be the real issue with the slider. Not only that you'll find much less software supported by the included Symbian UIQ OS than let's say Windows Mobile or Symbian S60 OS, but you'll also be disappointed by the fact that only a few of these can be installed on the device. Why's that? It seems that most of the supported applications are either too old or simply cannot pass the security system check. This is a serious problem and makes the phone rather unhandy and inefficient.

Communications Despite the fact that Z8 has been tagged as a mid-tier handset, Motorola embedded 3G and HSDPA technologies, which are mostly specific to high-end handsets. The only thing that is missing might be the WLAN connectivity, but that is not really necessary as the phone is not that user friendly. Anyway, tests revealed a little bit of sluggishness in data transfer speed: 329 Kbit/s download and 50 Kbit/s upload for HSDPA, 60 Kbit/s download and 18 Kbit/s upload for EDGE. No impressive at all, but at least the Opera 8.65 browser offers users great speed when surfing the Internet. The Web-browser can format the page of any site across the width of the screen, but can also display the image on landscape or full screen. Users will also be able to save any website to favorites (directly in the phone's memory), switch off the image displaying or the Java scripts. The slider also features Bluetooth 2.0 with EDR and A2DP support (96 KB/s upload and 103 KB/s download). In terms of messaging, the phone accepts standard text messages, MMS, flash and sound messages, as well as emails. The message client supports the usual POP3, SMTP and IMAP4 protocols. The tri-band (GSM 900 / GSM 1800 / GSM 1900) network compatible slider has one of the best GSM signal reception, but somewhat poor 3G/HSDPA signal reception. Unfortunately I have experienced 'Network busy' alert messages pretty frequently, when trying to call someone. This didn't happen with other phones that I had, so I don't believe it was a problem with the mobile operator's network. The sound's clarity is above average thanks to the CrystalTalk technology incorporated, and loud enough. Nevertheless, the vibration is somewhat mediocre in intensity and cannot be set to higher levels. That will surely make you miss a lot of calls if you set the phone on Silent.

Processor and Memory The 'kicker slider' is powered by an OMAP 2420 ARM11 processor. The frequency of the CPU is 332 MHz. This is the same powerful CPU that has been embedded into Nokia's E90 model. That only means fast browsing, but also smooth multimedia and gaming experience. Don't be too happy yet. The slider seems to keep opened all the applications that have been used. If you press the Menu key on the external keypad a small window will appear that will list all the applications running in the background. Unfortunately, you don't have the option to close any of these. As a consequence the handset will start to lag more and more until you decide to restart it. Space storage won't be an issue for Motorola RIZR as the phone comes with 80MB internal memory, but can be upgraded up to 32GB (microSD). Even if we don't have that kind of microSD cards, it's nice that the handset has been prepared for the future.

Multimedia The integrated music player supports a wide range of formats such as: AMR NB, XMF, MP3, AAC, AAC+, AAC Enhanced and MIDI. It can be minimized and ran in the background while you access other applications or functions of the phone. There are few settings that can be used: Play Mode (Normal, Loop Curr, Loop All, Shuffle) and Audio Routing (select speaker and/or headphones). There's also an interesting feature of the player – a widget on the home screen showing the properties of the track and playing status. The vibes quality is average, just like the music player interface. There's nothing surprising with this so called 'multimedia monster'. I believe it has been called that way because the phone comes with 'The Bourne Identity' movie stored on a 512 MB microSD card. The Mobiclip Player which is

used to watch the movie is pretty useless when you want to see other clips. The only solution to these problems would be the installation of a wide range of codecs. Still, the small display doesn't offer too much of a 'multimedia experience' compared with the latest Nokia N95 8GB, which also comes with 'Spider Man 3' movie. **Battery**The 1100 mAh Li-Ion battery is a little bit disappointing. Even if it has an officially stated life expectancy of 380 hours in standby and 5 hours in talk time mode, in truth it failed to attain more than 3 hours of continuous talk. Unfortunately it takes at least 3 hours to fully recharge the battery and that is only if you use the charger that comes with the phone and not the miniUSB cable. The latter will pretty much double the time period. **Impressions**Motorola RIZR Z8 could've been a great success if the US-based handset manufacturer had more feedback from its fans. The only thing that I believe it's worth buying the phone is the weird look. The phone's ergonomics is no less than excellent, pity that everything stops here. **The Good**Motorola made a good choice when decided to refurbish the 'banana phone' form factor. By adding some of its own innovations, Motorola made Z8 look very original, thus improving its desirability. I would also enlist here the excellent display and powerful CPU. **The Bad** Unfortunately, Z8 has more negatives than positives. The most important downside of the slider is the fact that even if it has been designed to feature a touch-screen, Motorola decided to drop it in the end, but 'forgot' to modify the OS and user-interface accordingly. This makes the user unable to install and use many 3rd party applications. The battery of the phone together with multimedia features are also overrated. **Sales package**Motorola RIZR Z8 handset Motorola Battery Li-Ion 1100 mAh Home Charger Stereo Headset USB Data Cable 512MB microSD Memory Card + SD Adapter Motorola PcSync CD User's Manual (English)*Photo: Tudor Raiciu for Softpedia.com*