

21 November 2008

By: Cosmin Vasile, Communications News Editor

Nokia 7310 Supernova
Nokia

Nokia 7310 Supernova Review

Cheap mid-tier handset with good features

Starting 2008, Nokia launched a new series, mostly targeting emerging markets, but also fans that could not afford the Eseries, or the more expensive Nseries devices. The new Supernova series of mobile phones is also a remake of the older devices that "amazed" Nokia fans thanks to their exchangeable covers. Almost all Supernova mobile phones are offered now with various exchangeable covers, which are meant to keep the owners interested for much longer. Even if based on mid-tech features, Supernova series devices are offered at lower prices, to attract as many potential buyers as possible. Nokia 7310 has been included in the first wave of Supernova devices, which were meant to test the handset market. Today, Nokia has 5 Supernova series mobile phones available on the market, which means that Nokia 7310 has had a certain amount of success since its debut.

Announced in June 2008, Nokia 7310 Supernova was made available on the market at the same time. The handset can be acquired for no more than US\$180, without any plan. Prices may vary by location and carrier, so chances are high that you'll be able to get it for under US\$150.

Design

The candy-bar form factor is the one with the highest longevity through Nokia handsets, and the Finnish giant seems to have learned the secret recipe for its successful bar devices. For those interested in "history," there are 2 candy-bar Supernovas, 2 sliders and 1 clamshell. Nokia 7310 Supernova can be easily included in the "classic" category in terms of design, as it doesn't stand out from the crowd because of its forms. The handset features the same "old school" bar form that Nokia took to the highest level of art. Still, without impressing too much at first glance, Nokia 7310 will eventually catch your eye only if you manage to stay with it a little longer. The device measures 106.5 x 45.4 x 12mm, and weighs 83g (including battery).

It feels good and fits perfectly in hand, while the construction is very balanced, even if it's made from cheap plastic. Users who aren't too careful with their phones may probably

break it a few times, but, fortunately this one comes with an exchangeable cover. Nevertheless, the thing is that the supplementary cover is pink and, naturally, if you're not a girl, you'll surely dislike the color. Either way, let's get down to business and see what this phone has to offer in terms of design. Being a mid to low-end device has its advantages, so Nokia 7310 Supernova includes only a few external keys. Therefore, you'll only notice the dual-volume keys on the right side of the phone.

There's also a 2.5mm jack port on the top of the phone, together with a micro-USB port, whereas the charger port has been placed on the left part. The back cover of the phone is pretty thin, and made from a cheap plastic, as I have already noted above. Three loudspeakers are placed near the bottom of the back cover, and a 2 Megapixel camera on the upper part. However, this device also comes with some disadvantages, such as the lack of a dedicated camera button, and the hard to find memory card slot. The latter can be found under the back cover, so getting to it if you're in a hurry can be a little bit hard. You can either power off the phone and pull out the back cover, or you can simply carefully take it out, so you won't move the battery.

The main attraction of the phone is undoubtedly the mirror effect of the display. Basically, the screen has been covered with a special plastic that mimics the mirror effect, pretty much like LG Shine and Sony Ericsson Z555i. The keypad has been also covered with the same plastic that simulates the mirror effect, but what's more important is that it's not really a fingerprint magnet. Of course, it will be soiled and fingerprints will stand out, but only to a small degree. Otherwise, Nokia 7310 looks like an ordinary Nokia bar, neither too bad, nor all that great. The innovation comes in the form of exchangeable covers and the mirror effect of the small display.

Display and Camera

Besides the mirror-like effect, the 2-inch TFT screen supports 16 Million colors (24 bit color depth) and 240x320 pixel resolution. I wasn't too pleased with the quality of the imaging, but thankfully, it's readable under strong sunlight. As long as the phone is in standby mode, you'll only be able to see yourself reflected in the screen, as only after pushing a key, the display will actually be ready for use.

This makes screensavers almost useless, as you cannot see any picture because of the mirror-like plastic that covers the display. In terms of performance, Nokia's 7310 screen is comparable to the 8800 Arte and 5310 XpressMusic displays. This means medium results in benchmarks, as you can also see from the screenshots below.

The embedded 2 Megapixel camera lacks flash or auto-focus capabilities. The maximum resolution that users can set to take pictures is of 1600x1200 pixels. The maximum resolution that can be used for movie recording is of 176x144 pixels (15fps). The interface is pretty much straightforward, with settings like Effects, White balance, and Camera sound.

Unfortunately, besides the low-quality pictures that the camera takes, saving them is also a nightmare, as it takes at least 7-10 seconds to save a picture shot at maximum resolution.

As you can see from the samples below, the camera is not the best in its range. I also believe that this is the same module camera as the one used with the Nokia 5310 XpressMusic device, since it features the same problems.

No flash means no night pictures, so you are limited to day shots, but you still have to arm yourself with patience when using the camera. Sadly, this is one major drawback of the phone, even if it's not a camera phone.

Menu and Software

Nokia 7310 Supernova classic runs on a S40 5th Edition interface with Feature Pack 1, which is the latest user-interface coming from Nokia. If you have owned a Nokia handset before and it didn't have a Symbian OS, then this candy-bar will probably feel the same. One of the most user-friendly interfaces on the market, the S40 seems unchanged on the surface, and offers the Nokia 7310 Supernova user an excellent experience. Nothing has really changed and you'll notice the same menus, submenus and icons, even the same animation.

Nokia's Series 40 5th Edition UI allows users to experience streaming videos, image rendering, mobile 3D graphics and scalable 2D Vector graphics. The Series 40 5th Edition also supports the latest version of Adobe's Flash Lite 2.1, the interoperable platform that enables the accelerated development and delivery of rich graphical mobile content, and includes audio file playback and streaming capabilities that provide audio and music enhancements to both mobile gaming and multimedia experience.

The handset also includes some useful applications, such as Search, Alarm clock, Calendar, To-do list, Notes, Calculator, Countdown timer, World Clock and Stopwatch. The menu is fully customizable and you can designate any MP3, MIDI or AAC file as ringtone. Nokia's integrated browser also did not change, but you might want to use Opera Mini for faster and smoother browsing.

The phonebook can store up to 2,000 contacts, and each one can be filled with up to five different phone numbers. The fonts can be customized, but only those displayed when opening Contacts, Web browser and messaging sections.

Also, some Java games come preinstalled - Sudoku, Snake III and Backgammon. The phone is compatible with Java MIDP 2.1 applications, but there is a limit to the size of any application that you might want to install on the phone, and that's the usual 1MB. This might be the case for most Java compatible applications, but I noticed that I could run some files that were around 1.5MB in size. Nevertheless, not all Java applications will work on this mid-end device, so you might want to try that out for yourself.

Communications

Nokia 7310 Supernova is fully compatible with GPRS Class 32 (88 kbps), HSCSD (57.6 kbps) EDGE Class 32 (296 / 177.6 kbps), but as benchmarks revealed, the device attained

average scores in terms of data transfer speed (EDGE only 82 Kbit/s download and 49 Kbit/s upload), but that may greatly vary depending on the location and carrier.

The phone also features Bluetooth 2.0 with A2DP and EDR for faster data transfers. Synchronization with PC is possible through the proprietary microUSB port, but don't forget to install the software that comes with the phone before.

I had problems synchronizing the phone with my PC; in fact, I couldn't browse any files after the device had already been recognized. I should also mention that the battery doesn't charge when the phone is synchronized.

In terms of messaging, the phone accepts standard text messages, MMS (300 KB attachments), as well as emails. The message client works with POP3, SMTP, and IMAP4 protocols, and supports more than one email accounts.

The tri-band (GSM 900 / GSM 1800 / GSM 1900) network compatible candy-bar has a good GSM signal reception. The sound is above average in quality at both ends, and pretty loud. The vibration alert is somewhat mediocre in intensity, and cannot be set to higher levels. This phone was released in two versions for different areas, and both versions are tri-band. However, if you're in America, you might want to buy the GSM 850 / 1800 / 1900 version.

Processor and Memory

Nokia 7310 Supernova isn't compatible with JBenchmark Pro, so I was forced to use the obsolete JBenchmark 1.0, 2.0, 3D and HD. Even if current devices are over-optimized against many of these old tests, I say that the results are pretty relevant if compared with other devices in its range.

Nokia 7310 Supernova is most likely powered by an ARM9 family processor running at speeds of up to 220 MHz. This is pretty solid for a mid-tier device like the 7310 bar handset. Unfortunately, there is something wrong with the phone, as I have experienced lags when browsing the menu. This might occur from the defective implementation of the firmware, or because the CPU is simply not enough to handle so much flash animation.

The candybar embeds 32MB user free internal memory, which can be expanded as the phone features a microSD slot card. The memory is hot-swappable, but you must pull out the back cover to notice the microSD slot card. Officially, Nokia 7310 Supernova is compatible with 4GB microSD memory cards, but I tested it with 8GB cards and everything worked fine. Thumbs up for Nokia.

Multimedia

The integrated MP3 player looks very cool, and is compatible with MP3, AAC, AAC+, eAAC+ and WMA formats. The included HS-47 Stereo headset enables users to take advantage of the average sound quality offered by the device. Don't expect too much from the headset or from the phone, as this is not a music device.

The interface of the MP player looks nice, there's nothing fancy about it, and only few settings can be used, such as Equalizer, Stereo widening, Shuffle and Repeat. Equalizer can be customized, or you can use the predefined settings: Normal, Pop, Rock, Jazz and Classical.

A Bluetooth headset can be the answer to many problems, as the phone supports the A2DP profile. The sound is loud, but lacks some clarity. There's also an FM radio with RDS function that can replace the music player. All three speakers placed on the back of the phone offer users the option of listening music without headphones. Unfortunately, sound is pretty low and lacks clarity.

Battery

The 860 mAh Li-Ion (BL-4CT) battery has an officially stated life expectancy of 300 hours in

standby and about 4 hours in talk time mode. What we got was 3 days of use, with 40-minute calls per day. This phone is only for medium usage, so I wouldn't recommend to heavy users to buy the handset. The low talk time of phone will surely prevent many potential buyers from getting one.

Impressions

Nokia 7310 Supernova makes a good addition to Nokia's mid-level portfolio, and is clearly one of the best choices for emerging markets. The stylish, compact and solid construction, as well as the possibility of changing its look, makes this candybar versatile. It felt good using it, but there was also a feeling that something was missing.

The Good

The main attraction of the phone, the exchangeable covers, and the mirror-like effect are the only things that might appeal to Nokia fans. The low price will probably bring more buyers as well, but I cannot add more in terms of technical features.

The Bad

I consider the 2 Megapixel camera the only big flaw in the construction of Nokia's 7310 Supernova. Everything else could work better - however, for such a price, I think suffice it to say that it is worth the money. More attention on the design part, as well as a better material, would have made it look more stylish and eliminated the feeling of touching something cheap (not that it's not true).

Sales package

Nokia 7310 Supernova handset
Nokia Battery BL-4CT
Nokia Compact Charger AC-3
Nokia Stereo Headset HS-47
Xpress-on cover User Guide