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[Sony Ericsson K550i Review](#)

Excellent mid-level Cyber-shot

Once upon a time, there was a Cyber-shot ... and then suddenly there were more. Following the huge success of its K790 and K800 Cyber-shot handsets, Sony Ericsson decided to spread its series to a broader audience. Focusing mainly on its two well-known series (Walkman and Cyber-shot) forced Sony-Ericsson to launch on the market a whole range of phones that look the same in terms of design, but differ in technical features. While the Walkman series addresses those that are looking for sound quality, the Cyber-shot series is more pragmatic and integrates only the best camera modules on the market but nothing more. Sony Ericsson K550i is just another Cyber-shot series handset which targets people that cannot afford to buy a more expensive camera phone such as the K790 or K800. There are no major differences in design among the Cyber-shot phones, and the only thing that makes this phone cheaper than its older (better) brothers is the camera which is lower in quality. Still, let's not forget that we're talking about one of the best camera phone series, thus K550i could be an excellent choice for those that are low on budget. Announced in February 2007, the phone has been launched on the market in Jet Black or Pearl White colors starting with the end of the same month, being available in 2 different versions: K550 and K550im (i-mode). The USD 260\$ price for this phone is rather overrated, but it may greatly vary depending on the location and the plan you are opting for. **Design** There is nothing new in terms of design and if you look at any of the handsets launched by Sony Ericsson in the last 2 years, you won't notice major differences. The K550i model makes no exception and while it is much slimmer than its high-end predecessors (K790 and K800) and features the latest sleek keypad layout, it has nothing innovative or eye-catching. The Jet Black version of the phone looks good combined with pieces of silvery compound. It has the camera button and the volume keys (which can be also used for zoom) on the right side and the universal port used for charge, synchronization and handsfree, has been placed on the left. On the same side, there's a Play key which activates the radio, but you can only use it when you have the handsfree connected. On the top of the phone, you will notice the power button and the Infrared port. The 2 Megapixel camera on the back has an active lens cover that protects it. You can quickly access the camera by sliding down the lens cover. Right next to the camera, you will barely notice the external speaker. Unfortunately, the M2 memory slot card has been placed under the hood of the back cover, but at least you won't be forced to pull out the battery. The thin buttons of the keypad might look very hard to use at first glance, but don't worry, as you'll get used to it. Even for those that are heavy SMS-text users it won't be a real issue after 2 days of use. The exact measures of the phone 102 x 46 x 14 mm and its weight (85 grams including battery), make it one of the smallest handsets of the Cyber-shot series. Overall, the phone looks compact and sturdy, but in terms of design, it totally lacks the X-factor. **Display and Camera** Sony Ericsson K550i uses a TFD LCD (thin film diode) display capable of supporting up to 262k colors and a rather low resolution of 176 x 220 pixels. Older than the TFT technology, TFD saves more of the battery's energy, it has a higher contrast and colors are more vivid. On the other hand, those that are more pretentious will probably want to skip this, as the TFD technology doesn't display the colors correctly. I'm still thinking that this is an excellent choice for a Cyber-shot series handset, especially because the differences between techs are not that obvious, at least that's what the benchmarks are showing. Other than that, the screen is almost visible in the sunlight and it uses a blue light as backlighting, which looks very stylish when the phone is used in darker environments. The 2 Megapixel camera with auto focus, LED photo light and active lens cover, makes it possible for you to be always ready to shoot

and share the best possible images. Simply by sliding open the lens cover, the camera is activated and the Cyber-shot menu appears on the phone's screen, which at 1.9" serves as a clear viewfinder. There are various settings that you can use to improve the quality of the snapshots: balance (Daylight, Cloudy, Fluorescent, Incandescent), Effects (Black & white, Negative, Sepia, Solarize), Shoot mode (Normal, Panorama, Frames, Burst), Scenes (Twilight landscape, Twilight portrait, Landscape, Portrait, Beach/Snow, Sports), Focus (Auto, Macro, Infinite). Unfortunately, you won't be able to use the volume keys for zooming, unless you select the Burst mode, which shoots VGA quality pictures. The maximum resolution of the camera is 1632 x 1224 pixels; as for the clips, you can only record at a maximum resolution of 176 x 144 pixels. Furthermore, the clips can only be recorded using the QCIF low resolution. As you can see from the snapshots, the quality of the images greatly depends on the light conditions. Try to always have the light in the back if you want high quality pictures. The Macro mode works great and will help you take close snapshots even in the night (don't forget to use the 2 LEDs). In terms of quality, the camera module is right under that of the K790 model and perhaps right above K750's. That is mainly because of the thinner case of the handset, which forced SE to reduce the thickness of the camera module also, thus resulting in a lower quality of the pics. The sample below has been executed under 360 watts of continuous tungsten light, especially created to test the quality of the camera module, with macro mode ON.

Menu and Software Since 2005, Sony Ericsson hasn't changed anything to its interface. Instead, it only came up with new applications and mobile services from time to time, just to increase and enrich the functionality of its handsets. You get the usual Track ID application that will help you identify almost any song that you hear. Video DJ, Photo DJ and Music DJ will make you waste your free time faster than any other game you'll play. In fact, the only Java compatible game included on the handset that we received is Puzzle Slider. Besides the main menu, you will be able to access the Quick menu (by simply pushing the dedicated key), which contains shortcuts to various features of the phone (Bluetooth, Alarms, RSS reader, Calendar, Main menu), a report of various events (missed calls, alerts), as well as a list of running applications (if any). Other helpful applications that you'll find very easy to use and access include: Organizer, Calendar, Text notes, Stopwatch, Countdown timer, Alarm, Calculator and Code memory. The File manager is also easy to use and has 3 different views where it will list every folder on both the phone's memory and the external memory, or just on one of the two. You can also attach any MP3 file format, no matter where it is located (phone memory or external memory), to any ring tone, alert or alarm. For those that like to surf the Internet on their mobiles, Sony Ericsson included a standard browser that can work in landscape mode or even make the pages fit the screen's size. The browser also integrates an RSS reader which works smoothly. You can simply access the browser by pushing the dedicated key placed on the left of the 5-way controller button.

Communication In terms of communication, Sony Ericsson K550i includes GPRS and EDGE Class 10 technology, USB synchronization, Bluetooth 2.0 with A2DP support and Infrared. Unlike most of SE's handsets, K550i EDGE connectivity works pretty well, but still under the normal parameters. Data transfer speeds of up to 148 Kbit/s download and 53 Kbit/s upload are not top notch, but still... it's more than enough for any user that needs over-the-air data transfers. Bluetooth connection is rather mediocre with data transfer speeds up to 58 KB/s. Messaging capabilities are almost unlimited and the phone features full support for email client, which can easily handle POP and IMAP. The quad-band (GSM 850 / GSM 900 / GSM 1800 / GSM 1900) network compatible handset has a good GSM signal reception. The sound is very clear and loud enough for you to be able to talk on the phone in crowded areas with no problems.

Processor and Memory Sony Ericsson K550i embeds a very good ARM9 family processor that runs at speeds up to 218 MHz. This is the main reason why the phone is very fast and works like a charm. In fact, it's much faster than the K750i model, which integrates a low ARM9 110 MHz CPU. You'll have no trouble in running any Java compatible application you can think of, including applications that have more than 300 KB

in size. The gaming experience is smooth and immersible, with no lags or long loading times. The handset comes with 60 MB internal memory and about 512 MB Memory Stick Micro (M2), but that may depend on the location. The slot card for memory expansion is placed under the back cover of the phone, but fortunately, you won't need to pull out the battery to use it. That is pretty standard for a mid-level camera phone, so you should be content with the amount of memory that comes with the sales package. **Multimedia** Surprisingly enough, Sony Ericsson K550i includes almost all the features that you can find in the Walkman series, even if it's a purely camera phone. You won't get the special earphones that come with the Walkman lineup, but if you manage to attach one you'll have almost the same result. There's a version 2.0 of the music player, which features equalizer (same as the Walkman series except that it doesn't have MegaBass) and Stereo widening. The TrackID service will help you identify any song that you hear, but don't yet own. Furthermore, the handset includes an FM radio with RDS that can memorize up to 20 stations. You will notice that the stereo wired headset (HPM-62) that comes with the phone doesn't have a high quality and cannot be compared with the earphones you get with a Walkman phone. Still, if you attach better headphones, the quality will be surprisingly better; more than that, if you have the MegaBass mode available it would exceed any expectations. Anyway, you can easily use the Manual equalizer for a better sound if you'd like, so there's no real problem with the lack of the MegaBass. The external loudspeaker is pretty difficult to notice and has been placed under the camera. The sound is very clear and the volume is high enough for any listener to have a streaming multimedia experience. Both music player and radio can be easily run in the background whenever you feel like using other applications. I'd give this phone an 8 for its sound quality, which is more than excellent if we think that this handset is not intended to be a music phone. **Battery** K550i includes a Li-Po 950 mAh standard battery that has a standby time of 350 hours and up to 7 hours of talk time. I think we already got used to Sony Ericsson's high autonomy batteries, so it won't be a surprise for anyone to find out that the official numbers are almost near the test results. In truth, I'd say that about 6 hours of talk time is more likely, but this is highly appreciated anyway. Music playback is almost 14 hours, which is usually the same in case of a Walkman phone. **Impressions** While this is not one of the best Cyber-shot series phones, it surprises through versatility and quality. All test results recommend this phone as one of the best mid-level handsets in terms of camera, sound quality, but also price. Maybe a change in design would greatly improve Sony Ericsson's sales on all its handsets. **The Good** Cyber-shot phones usually have very good camera modules and K550i is no exception. Maybe it's a little bit tricky to take pictures with it, taking care of the light conditions and all, but this is a very good 2 Megapixel camera. In addition, the sound quality of the music playback is excellent, but only when you use different headphones than those found in the sales package. **The Bad** Perhaps the sleek keypad design was not a very good idea, especially for those with big fingers. A new redesigned look would have attracted more buyers. Other than that, Sony Ericsson's K550i is the perfect mid-level handset and offers exactly what it says it will offer, at above average standards. **Sales package** Sony Ericsson K550i handset Battery Li-Polymer 950 mAh USB cable DCU-65 Stereo Portable Handsfree Headset HPM-62 PC Tools & Software Adobe Photoshop Album *Photo: Tudor Raiciu for Softpedia.com*