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[Sony Ericsson K850i Review](#)



The flagship of Cyber-shot series doesn't disappoint

There's no doubt about it, the new Sony Ericsson K850i is the new star of the Cyber-shot series. After the huge success of K550i and K800i, Sony Ericsson decided to challenge Nokia's high-end N95 handset offering the same 5-megapixel camera at a lower price.

Despite the fact that Sony Ericsson's K850i cannot be compared with Nokia's N95 in terms of functionality, it's still a good choice for those that are looking for a camera that features phone capabilities. The best phone in its class, Sony Ericsson K850i has some drawbacks, but also marvelous features that will simply take your breath away.

Sony Ericsson K850i has been unveiled in June 2007 and made available on the market later on in September. It is the most expensive Cyber-shot series handset and can be acquired for about USD 650.

Design

Sony Ericsson K850i cannot be compared with its Cyber-shot series predecessors in terms of design. Even if the series kept the same candybar form, all other design related features have been reshaped into something new. Innovation doesn't necessarily mean improvement and K850i has its advantages, but also some drawbacks. Its simple measures, 102 x 48 x 17 mm, seem to depend mostly on the module camera which couldn't be fitted onto a slimmer device and still have the same quality. The handset is not that heavy and weighs only 118 grams (including battery), which makes it very handy to use even when taking pictures with long exposure times.

There are many control keys that will enable you to set the phone camera to different modes to obtain good quality snapshots. The handset is surrounded by a green reflective plastic stripe which adds to its stylish look. The right side of the phone looks almost like a

pure digital camera with a 3-mode button that enables the user to set the camera to camera mode, video mode or preview mode. There's also the ON/OFF camera button which controls the protective lens that opens when you want to use the camera. Upside the camera controls you'll notice a dual ZOOM key that can also be used for setting the in-call volume. The left side of the phone has been kept "clean" with no other buttons or keys. The TFT display has been covered by a protective plastic to avoid any damage, but the compound is a real fingerprint catcher. Sony Ericsson comes with a new type of navigational key that has never been used onto other Cyber-shot models. Three sensor-touch controls have been placed at the base of the screen to simply increase the maneuverability of the handset. Those are very helpful indeed and users will get used to it in no time. The controls are functioning just like a normal PDA touchscreen only that they are limited to the base of the screen, so don't try to touch the rest of your screen as it will have no consequence whatsoever.

For a faster identification of the controls you can see in the pictures that there are three white dots just under the screen, which will show you the approximate locations of these soft keys. The main 5-way navigational key has been replaced by a weird greenish D-pad, which surrounds the middle 2 and 5 keys. This obviously saves some space for the keypad, but Sony Ericsson didn't use this space to make bigger and more friendly-to-use keys. On the contrary, for those that use their mobiles to send messages it will be a pain to get used with the small keys. And even if you get used to it, you will still encounter some difficulties when trying to type long messages, especially if you have rather big ("potatoes") fingers. Above the big TFT display you'll notice the secondary camera which is used for video-calls and a small light sensor. Furthermore, you'll find the power button on the top side of the phone, and the specific universal port used for charging the device or to attach the headset that comes with the phone. The back of the phone looks very shiny and glossy, but that will only make it greasier after intense use. The 5-megapixel camera is protected by an auto-covering lens that won't open until you push the special button on the right side of the phone. To the right of the camera there's an external speaker used for listening to music. The camera also features Xenon flash, but also has an 3LED additional light, which is used especially when recording clips in darker areas. Both can be found to the left of the camera.

The backlighting of the phone is white and makes the keys extremely visible when it lights. Also, when you're using the camera there's a set of keys that are lighting in blue for a better control of the camera settings. You'll not be able to open up the back cover as the phone has a tricky opening mechanism. The bottom side of the phone needs to be pushed

upwards, so you can insert your SIM card or M2 memory card. As seen in the pictures the battery is also inserted in the same place as the other 2 mentioned above.

Looking at the phone as a whole you get the impression of keeping a brick in your hand, a glossy brick. While not really catching your eye, SE's K850i is better at catching grease and fingerprints. Overall the mobile phone has a standard SE Cyber-shot design, 'dotted' with some cool innovative keys and buttons.

Display and Camera

The 2.2 inch TFT display of the bar phone supports up to 262k colors and 240 x 320 pixels resolutions. Pictures taken with the phone look very sharp and playing a Java game could be a pleasure if not the low CPU embedded. Moreover, the phone's screen is perfectly visible in the sunlight, supposedly you set the brightness to maximum (100%). Otherwise you could say that the display is a little bit dark.

Other than the innovative touch soft keys placed at the base of the screen there's nothing special about it. It can be mostly compared with the T650i handset display, which had almost the same results when benchmarked (maybe a little bit better). For protection reasons the screen has been covered by a dark plastic, which also takes some of the display's luminosity.

The 5-megapixel camera of the phone features xenon flash, video 3LED light and autofocus. For better results, all of these must be used after reading the manual that comes in the sales package or after completing the tutorial that comes in the phone's software. The maximum resolution that can be used for taking pictures is 2592 x 1944 pixels, while clips can be recorded in QVGA resolution at 30fps.

The camera has a wide range of settings and options that you can take advantage of. After choosing the resolution of the picture, you can opt for any of these settings: Normal, BestPic, Panorama, Frames. If you want to take pictures at night I suggest you disable the flash and set your camera on Twilight landscape mode. Bear in mind that this mode needs a longer exposure time, so you'll have to keep your hand still longer than a usual picture, or you could use a tripod.

The camera also features a Macro mode, Infinite mode or Red-eye reduction mode. For 'heavy' users there are also available 3 ISO standards: ISO 100, ISO 200 and ISO 400. White balance (Daylight, Cloudy, Incandescent and Fluorescent) and Effects (Black&White, Negative, Sepia and Solarize) are also available for use, should the need arise. You can use the same settings for clips with some minor exceptions.

From the snapshots below you can see that the camera performed very well in all conditions: strong light, poor light or dark. Still, compared with Nokia's N95 camera phone, K850i loses in more areas with a total ratio of 4:2 in N95's favor. First pictures taken with N95 look more vivid, have a higher color contrast and colors are more real. K850i Cyber-shot seems to mix these colors for an unknown reason. In poor light conditions Nokia N95 is definitely better as it has a slightly bigger light sensor than K850i. The latter totally owns when it comes to shooting in total darkness as it features a xenon flash, nothing much to discuss here. Outdoor and close-up pictures are also better taken with N95 because of the higher contrast and more accurate colors. Overall, K850i's camera module is great to have even if it is a little bit lower in performance than N95's, especially if you get it at a cheaper price.

The sample below has been executed under 360 watts of continuous tungsten light, especially created to test the quality of the camera module.

Menu and Software

K850i handset features the same standard non-operating system platform, but it has been freshened up with some updated applications and visual effects. More to the point, the phone is fully compatible with Flash Lite themes, as well as video ringtones. Multimedia part has been reshaped and now offers the user a new interface that looks much the same as the 3.0 Walkman version.

It also features some well-known applications such as: TrackID, VideoDJ, PhotoDJ, MusicDJ and Remote control. The phonebook accepts up to 1000 contacts which feature various information to input.

The HTML NetFront Internet browser works like a charm and has a wide range of options to make your surf even smoother. The browser also offers the possibility to access RSS feeds for any website. Sony Ericsson K850i Cyber-shot is Microsoft Exchange ActiveSync enabled and supports wireless synchronization and Direct Push of email, calendar and contacts. In addition, it also includes support for Java push mail solutions provided by third parties and leading email standards, such as POP/IMAP.

Navigation through the menus is pretty fast until you run the MP3 player in the background. I have discovered that the phone experiences big lags when either the MP3 player or the Radio FM is running. It could be the low processor or a firmware bug, I'm not really sure. There's also an iPhone-like feature that offers users the possibility to view pictures in the album in landscape mode without the need of choosing this option manually.

The phone has been gifted with a Motion sensor that detects the orientation of the screen

the moment you start to navigate through your Album. Other functions and applications included: Alarms (only 5), Organizer, File manager, Picture editor, Timer, Stopwatch and Notes. I have found that you still can't tell when you missed a call, unless you wake up the phone.

Communications

Sony Ericsson K850i Cyber-shot is a high-end handset, thus it features HSDPA 3.6Mbps technology, which greatly improves data transfers. Even with our network limited to the 3G speed the phone still attained 554 Kbit/s download and 228 Kbit/s upload. EDGE data transfers were a little bit lower than expected, but still reached 116 Kbit/s download and 48 Kbit/s upload.

The handset is also compatible with Bluetooth 2.0 with A2DP technology and features USB 2.0, but lacks Infrared. I have experienced data transfer speeds of up to 104 KB/s when using Bluetooth connectivity, which is kind of nice.

Messaging capabilities have been improved and offer now a wider range of options. All messages share the same Inbox, except emails, which have their own Inbox. You can now manage your messages the way you want and categorize it the way you want or you could just simply use the pre-installed categories: Business, Favorites, Follow Up, Fun, Holiday and Important. The email service is fully compatible with the POP3 and SMTP clients.

The quad-band (GSM 850 / 900 / GSM 1800 / GSM 1900) network compatible handset has

a good GSM signal reception, but very poor 3G signal reception. The sound is one of the best that I have experienced in any Sony Ericsson handset until now. It is very clear and loud enough for any user to be able to talk on the phone in crowded areas with absolutely no problems. Furthermore, the vibration is somewhat mediocre in intensity.

Processor and Memory

K850i Cyber-shot model features a low ARM9 family processor that runs with speeds up to 153 MHz. Just like in P1i smartphone case, this is really disappointing as the phone cannot handle to work smoothly other applications the moment you run the music player or the radio in the background. Fortunately the Java emulator embedded can handle any compatible large size files (over 300KB) with no problems.

The phone comes with 40 MB internal memory and a 512 MB micro M2 memory card in the sales package. This is very low if we think that a picture taken at maximum resolution (5 Megapixels) can reach even 1,5 MB in size. Otherwise, you can expand the storage space up to 2 GB and take as many shots as you want. The M2 micro slot card has been placed upside the battery and can be inserted without the need of powering off the phone. Sony Ericsson K850i is the only SE handset compatible with both micro and M2 memory cards. Obviously the M2 cards are more expensive, so owners of the phone will probably buy themselves the microSD version, but still it's a nice addition to the phone.

Multimedia

Even if this phone is mostly camera oriented, Sony Ericsson K850i can offer you almost the same quality in terms of music. The new multimedia interface and the quality sound of the music played make K850i Cyber-shot one of the best music players in its class. The embedded Music Player 3.0 supports MP3, AAC, AAC+, E-AAC +, WAV, WMA, M4A and MIDI file formats and takes advantage of a great Equalizer which includes settings such as MegaBass and Treble.

Even with the earphones included the sound is of a highest quality, but still cannot be compared with any of the Walkman series. The FM radio supports RDS and can memorize up to 20 stations.

This is one of the best multimedia solutions and can be an exception, as there's no Sony Ericsson phone that meets both high standard requirements: good pictures and good music.

Battery

Sony Ericsson K850i features a 930 mAh Li-Polymer battery, which has an official lifetime of approximately 400 hours in standby mode and 9 hours in talk time mode. For a heavy user that talks 8-9 hours a day the phone needs to be recharged daily, but for a soft user 1 recharge per week is more than enough. Music playback time is near 18 hours with display in standby mode. Overall, a high quality battery of small dimensions that barely adds to the weight of the phone.

Impressions

If you look past its awkward keypad design you can actually love this phone. The black version looks very stylish, but only until you start putting your hands on it. This is a very good alternative to Nokia's N95 handset, in terms of camera, but also in terms of multimedia features. Also the price of the handset is considerably much lower than N95, even if it lacks some of its technical features (WLAN).

The Good

The best phone from the Cyber-shot series, even if not cheap can definitely satisfy any mobile phone fan. Aside from the fact that it features the best camera ever embedded in a Sony Ericsson handset and HSDPA connectivity, K850i also features high quality multimedia features. Combined with a very good battery the phone can offer users plenty of hours of music listening at higher standards.

The Bad

Besides the fact that the keypad is very difficult to use, Sony Ericsson handsets seem to be improved nicely. Perhaps a much better CPU would've make this handset much faster or at least will make lags disappear. Furthermore, the lack of WLAN might limit its functionality compared with N95, and a user that has to decide between the two will probably choose N95 for its possibility of connecting to the Internet through WiFi technology. If you like your phones to be clean and shiny then don't choose Sony Ericsson's K850i Cyber-shot, because it's a real fingerprint magnet.

Sales package

Sony Ericsson K850i Cyber-shot
512MB Memory Stick Micro (M2)
Charger
USB Cable
Stereo Headphones
Strap
CD with Software
Manuals

Photo: Tudor Raiciu for Softpedia.com