

LIVE FROM
THE 2012 PARIS
AUTO SHOW

LIGHTING UP WITH
AMAZON'S KINDLE
PAPERWHITE

CAN QWERTY
CARRY THE GALAXY
S RELAY 4G?

PLUS: HUBBLE
STARES DEEP INTO
SPACE

DISTRO

100512 #60

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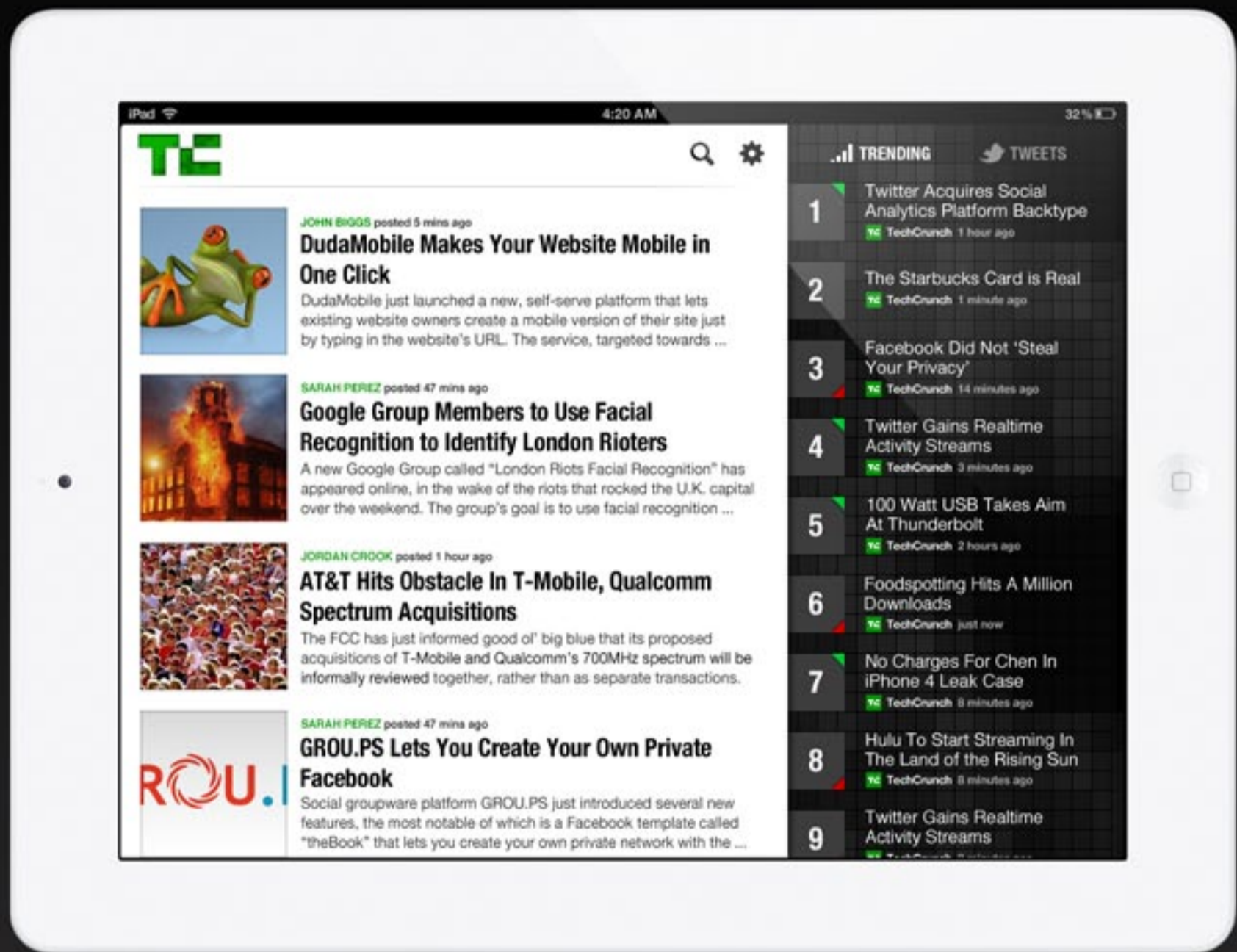
SECOND LIFE

HOW CROWD
FUNDING GAVE
ONE STARTUP
THE CHANCE
TO START OVER



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ISSUE 60

DISTRO

10.05.12

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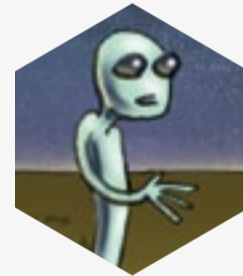
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REHASHED
T-Mo
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TIME MACHINES
Wheels of Time



KONICHIWA

DISTRO
10.05.12

EDITOR'S
LETTER

This week, Tokyo. A harried travel schedule for sure, but all to bring you more coverage of more good stuff. It's the CEATEC show, Japan's biggest concentration of high-tech goods — well, outside of Akihabara, at least. It could be seen as the Japanese CES, but it has a very different feel, with far more focus on conceptual products that will only appear far in the future, if at all, and of course an awful lot of robots of different shapes and sizes.

Transportation was a major theme of this year's show, with dozens of EVs big and small peppering the exhibit floor. Nissan had the largest chunk of space allocated, making room for a self-driving version of its Leaf battery-powered electric car. This prototype, dubbed NSC-2015, can do the self-parking thing, which isn't very novel these days. More interestingly, with the touch of a button on a smartphone (they were using a Galaxy S III to demonstrate it) the car will drive down the parking lot aisle and park itself, thus striking fear into the hearts of career valet parkers everywhere.

It can also drive further down the road when someone is behind the wheel, stopping for pedestrians and moving to

the side to avoid oncoming traffic on any of Japan's notoriously skinny streets. The car's owner can even get a live, 360-degree stream of video from the car, regardless of where it's parked (so long as its integrated LTE connection finds signal), enabling you to keep an eye on your baby from anywhere.

Best of all? Nissan plans to offer this as an option by 2015, a date close enough to make us think they might actually be able to do it. NTT DoCoMo, meanwhile, was showing off something that most of the foreign journalists wanted to take home: an app that provides near-real-time translation of a human's voice. You speak into the app in any of 10 languages, the app performs speech recognition, internally translates it to the desired output, then speaks the resulting text out loud.

Cool? Yes, but it gets better. Whoever you're conversing with can then speak into the phone and the app will translate their speech back into your language. You can even do it via phone calls, which could make ringing for dinner reservations in a foreign land a real possibility. It's coming in just a few weeks, but sadly, only to NTT custom-



ers. I, for one, will be waiting eagerly for that APK to be posted online.

There was lots of other good stuff at the show, which you can check out on the site. In the broader tech world, somewhere at Facebook HQ a very large number gained a whole digit, with the company announcing that more than a billion people are now using Facebook each month. Just imagine what percentage of them are currently using the service to post vitriolic bits of political opining.


Judge Koh finally made the move this week to lift the sales ban on the Galaxy Tab 10.1, which you may recall was found to not infringe on any Apple patents. If you've been recently rebuffed in your attempts to get this particular Android slab in your life, you might want to try just one more time.

The Nokia Lumia 920 and 820 were confirmed to be launching on AT&T in November, with that carrier claiming exclusivity. It's a bit unfortunate to see such a strong phone stuck on just one US provider — even if it is a major one — but we're expecting the HTC Windows Phone 8X will be rather more agnostic when it ships this fall.

Tony Fadell unveiled a new version of the Nest Learning Thermostat, thinner and lighter — though how much that matters for something that gets screwed into the wall remains to be seen. It is also smarter, compatible with a much broader range of heating and cooling systems. Even humidi-

fiers. An Android tablet app has also been added to the pile.

Finally, CliffyB of *Unreal* fame made the sad announcement that he's leaving Epic Games. Bleszinski, whose resume dates all the way back to the *Jazz Jackrabbit* games of shareware lore, said he's taking a "much needed break," which could be code for "I'm sick of making *Gears of War* games." While I'm not sick of buying them, I do wish Cliff the best of luck in his future endeavors.

In this week's Distro, Brian Heater gives us a full review of the new, self-illuminating Kindle Paperwhite. Sarah Silbert evaluates the Samsung Galaxy S Relay 4G and we have plenty of lovely photos from the Paris Auto Show. Darren Murph continues his journeys abroad, taking a look at Kickstarter's effect on a Dubai startup, Joshua Fruhlinger asks why printers are stuck in the stone ages, Ross Rubin puts the blurring lines between tablets and laptops into focus and NVIDIA's Nick Stam does a quad-core Q&A. Get your benchmarks ready. 



TIM STEVENS
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF,
ENGADGET



SWIFT BIKES, CABLE WOES, PERFECT PASSWORDS AND PLAYBOOK PRAISE



Touch article names to read full threads

DISTRO
10.05.12

INBOX



CITY BIKES: A NEW SPIN
ON AN OLD DESIGN
ISSUE 59,
SEPTEMBER 28, 2012

“If this guy has really set out to ‘reduce America’s dependence on oil’ then he has failed. Don’t get me wrong, as a commuting cyclist I recognize a good bike when I see one, and this looks like an *excellent* bike. \$2,700 is not an unreasonable price for [what] you get, especially if it really is bespoke. However, \$2,700 is too much for

“I’ve actually ridden one of Dan Sorger’s ‘Swift’ bikes. The best innovation isn’t something you can see. It’s the engineering that’s gone into the frame. It’s incredibly efficient. I flew uphill with over 50lbs in panniers, as easy as walking up stairs unencumbered.”

—BENJAMIN SANCHEZ

a mass-market bike, and if it’s not mass market then you are not solving any oil problems. At this price it’s just a rich kid

hipster toy, if you want to make a difference in the world you need the bike to cost less than \$,1000.”

—JASPER THRUSSELL



BLACKBERRY DEV ALPHA B

ISSUE 59,

SEPTEMBER 28, 2012

“RIM seem to finally be getting some of their [stuff] together :-) If it weren't for Windows Phone, I'd seriously consider going with BlackBerry (but skipping the hardware keyboard) :-) I really love the design of the PlayBook (in my opinion the best looking tablet around) and this is like a mini-PlayBook :-P The business security stuff on their devices is right up my alley, I just wonder what the real retail device will look like. Hopefully even better!”

—HENRIK

DREAMS, CURIOSITY AND
A PASSION FOR WHAT'S
NEXT

ISSUE 57,

SEPTEMBER 14TH, 2012

‘Failure in technology should be more celebrated than it is.’ FINALLY,

someone said it. What's wrong with failed attempts to new ideas? At least, it's new. At least, it's progress, another step toward something better. Very intriguing think piece, Mr. Murph. It's time for us to turn

toward a more creation driven economy, not just another consumption driven decade.”

—JAVAFLASH

SONY XPERIA TABLET S

ISSUE 59,

SEPTEMBER 28, 2012

“The biggest complaint I had wasn't even touched on here, and that is that Sony changed their pre-production design which had a micro USB and HDMI port to their stupid proprietary Multi-port. This not only made it necessary to buy a cable for each of those functionalities (\$29 and \$49 respectively), but also hamstrung the device because you couldn't have both at the same time. That is, unless you bought the \$99 docking station (which blew from a design standpoint mind you). Want a keyboard? That'll be another 99 bucks ... And you get no ports either.

Stupid engineering? I think not. Greedy suits anyone? Bingo.”

—ROSSVOORHEES



I HATE PASSWORDS
ISSUE 59,
SEPTEMBER 28, 2012

“I’m sure it’s already floating around here, but there was an XKCD done a while back about creating memorable and strong passwords. The basic gist of it is to use four random words that are mostly only meaningful to you. Those four words would take a computer something like 12 trillion years to brute-force crack versus a few minutes for your standard “secure” password.

With that in mind, I possess perhaps the best password generator on the planet: a toddler. Between adorable gibberish and new favorite words, the things that come out of her mouth are both memorable and nonsensical enough to be GREAT passwords. Throw in your favorite number and symbol and boom, you’re set!”
—CHRISTOPHER HALL

“I can’t wait for biometric security to become the norm. I have a fingerprint scanner on my laptop. Why

“Your password must have at least 8 characters, one must be a number, 2 must be punctuation, one must be capitalized, no spaces or underscores, not dots or periods, one must be an asterisk, 2 must be in wingding font, none can be in comic sans, the first character must be complete with an umlaut.”

—MRSBELPIT

do I need a password? I should just be able to use that. Fingerprint scanners, of course, would have to become ubiquitous, which shouldn’t be too hard, and you can have a backup password. As long as it’s

secure, it seems like the perfect solution.”

—RYGAVS

Pull out your soapbox and hit up our Inbox directly at: Distroletters@engadget.com



ENTER

EYES-ON

DISTRO
10.05.12

CASE OF BASS

Tap for
detail

ONE OF
A KIND

RETRO
STYLING

VINTAGE AESTHETICS, CUSTOM SOUND

While boom boxes have been tossed to the side in recent years thanks to Bluetooth and wireless speaker options, one company is bringing the bass back in a rather unique manner. Portland, Oregon's Case of Bass grabs vintage suitcases and stuffs them full of speakers and audio components to create the up-cycled sound machines.

THE DAMAGE:
\$350 & Up

CAREFUL
SELECTION



TOYOTA'S SMART INSECT

PRICE: TBD

AVAILABILITY: CONCEPT

THE BREAKDOWN: THIS ELECTRIC PROTOTYPE PACKS KINECT SENSORS, WIRELESS HANDSET CHARGING AND CAN EVEN LOCK UP YOUR HOUSE.

Toyota had its new Smart

Insect prototype on display at CEATEC. The fully electric car charges via a standard 100-volt AC outlet, and it's decked out with gull-wing doors and motion detection courtesy of Microsoft's Kinect. The on-board motion sensors allow the car to recognize its owner based on face and body shape, and it predicts the owner's behavior by analyzing movement and determining when to open the door, for example. There's also voice recognition for opening the car door and other functions, with a speaker on the hood of the car and dashboard-mounted "dialogue monitors" on the front and back.

The tech carries through to the Insect's interior, which sports a wireless charging pad, a dash-mounted monitor that connects to the driver's handset and a button for dialing up Toyota's virtual agent. As a connected car, the Insect naturally ties in with entertainment and navigation services (in



Click on product names to read full stories



this case, via Toyota's Smart Center). There's also integration with a home energy management system, which allows the owner to adjust air conditioning and lock the front door via a smartphone app. As this is a proof of concept, it's unclear how well these features work, and it's unlikely that we'll ever see the prototype make it to market.



**PRICE: TBD****AVAILABILITY:**
MID-OCTOBER (UK)**THE BREAKDOWN:**
HTC'S NEW JELLY BEAN
HEAVYWEIGHT PACKS UPGRADED
INTERNALS AND NOTABLE
PERFORMANCE BOOSTS.

HTC ONE X+

The One X+. You have to reach for the Shift key just to type it out, but as names go it's neither unexpected nor inaccurate. On the hardware front, the One X+ has a faster Tegra 3 variant that clocks in at max of 1.7GHz, an enlarged 2,100mAh battery to keep the engine turning over, a capacity boost to 64GB and an upgraded, front-facing 1.6-megapixel camera. Most other specs stay the same, including the 8-megapixel rear camera, 1GB of RAM and the lovely 4.7-inch 1,280 x 720 Super LCD 2 display.

The One X+ makes a bold first impression with its red accents bouncing off a perfectly uniform black polycarbonate unibody. As mentioned, the rear camera module itself hasn't changed, but during our brief hands-on we did feel that it was benefiting from the extra speed of the processor. We took 20 shots in just 3.2 seconds, compared to five seconds on a One X. In terms of software, HTC's skin has been modified to work on top of Jelly Bean and brings a host of subtle improvements. The UI was good n' snappy, and if you're wondering whether Project Butter will actually make a difference then you can probably relax. It's not obvious, but you'll notice its smooth antics, especially in the pull-down menu.





PIONEER CARROZZERIA HEADS-UP DISPLAY

Pioneer has been showing off versions of its AR HUD for some time now, but at CEATEC 2012 the company is showing off a production version of the thing. It is, as its name implies, an augmented reality navigation unit that shows you where to go using a front-facing camera and a variety of systems. A projector built into the ceiling shines an overlay onto the road ahead, using a piece of plastic that flips down in front of the driver's eyes.

It's a cool effect that, unfortunately, we weren't able to snap a photo of, so you'll just have to trust us. But, more photogenic is the rendition that's created on the slide-out display of the head unit itself. Additionally, the system creates a sort of targeting reticule that appears over nearby cars, letting you know when you're perhaps driving a little too close. (That, of course, is when you have to switch from missiles to guns.) The head unit recently became available in Japan, and while there's no word on a release date or price in the US, hopefully it won't be far off.

PRICE: TBD

AVAILABILITY:
COMING SOON (US)

THE BREAKDOWN: A PROJECTOR CREATES AN OVERLAY ON THE ROAD AHEAD THAT OFFERS NAVIGATION INFO AND MORE.





NEST LEARNING THERMOSTAT (2012)

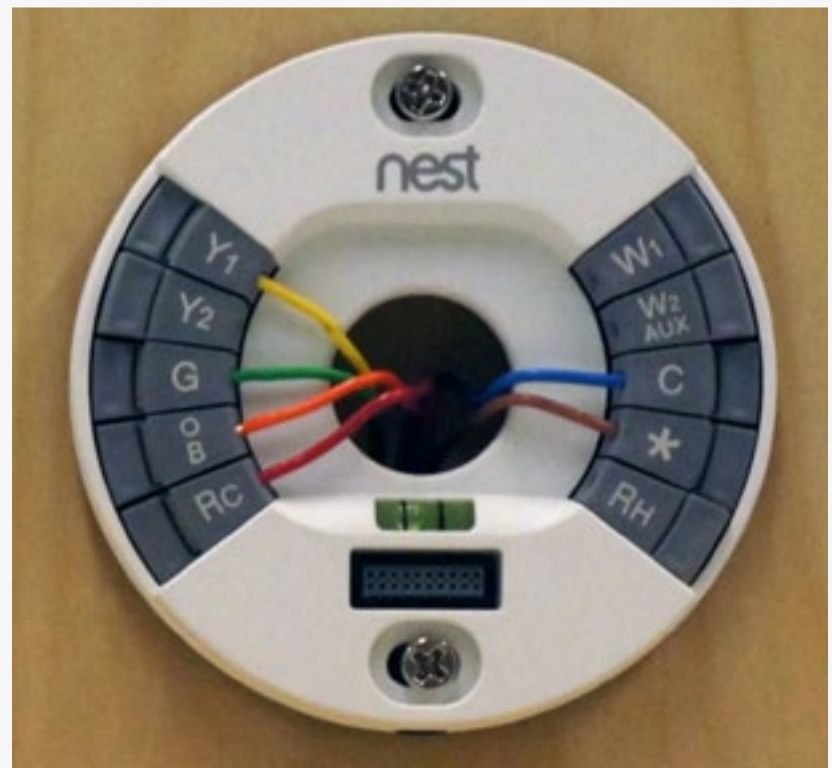
Nest Labs has announced the follow-up to its first thermostat, and while it boasts the same tricks as the original, it's noticeably slimmer and will work with a wider array of heating and cooling systems. Oh, and the company is finally releasing an Android tablet app, while the current iOS and Android phone applications are getting updated with new features as well. All told, Nest says the second-gen thermostat is 20 percent thinner than the original. There are some more subtle changes, too: the band is now made entirely of stainless steel, with no plastic bits. And whereas there used to be a grille on the front face, the sensors are now hidden under transparent plastic, making for an even less cluttered design.

The back plate, meanwhile, has been updated so that it now supports second-stage cooling systems, three-stage heating, humidifiers, dehumidifiers and emergency heat through heat pumps. According to Nest, that extra support should make the thermostat compatible with 95 percent of heating and cooling systems, up from 75 percent on last year's model. On the software side, the

PRICE: \$249

AVAILABILITY: OCTOBER 2012

THE BREAKDOWN: THE RETOOLED NEST THERMOSTAT SPORTS A SLIMMER FRAME AND A HOST OF NEW FEATURES.



most impressive new feature might be System Match, which learns, not just your schedule, but the idiosyncrasies of your home. Other new features include Auto-Away, which uses your scheduling patterns to predict when there won't be anybody at home. **D**

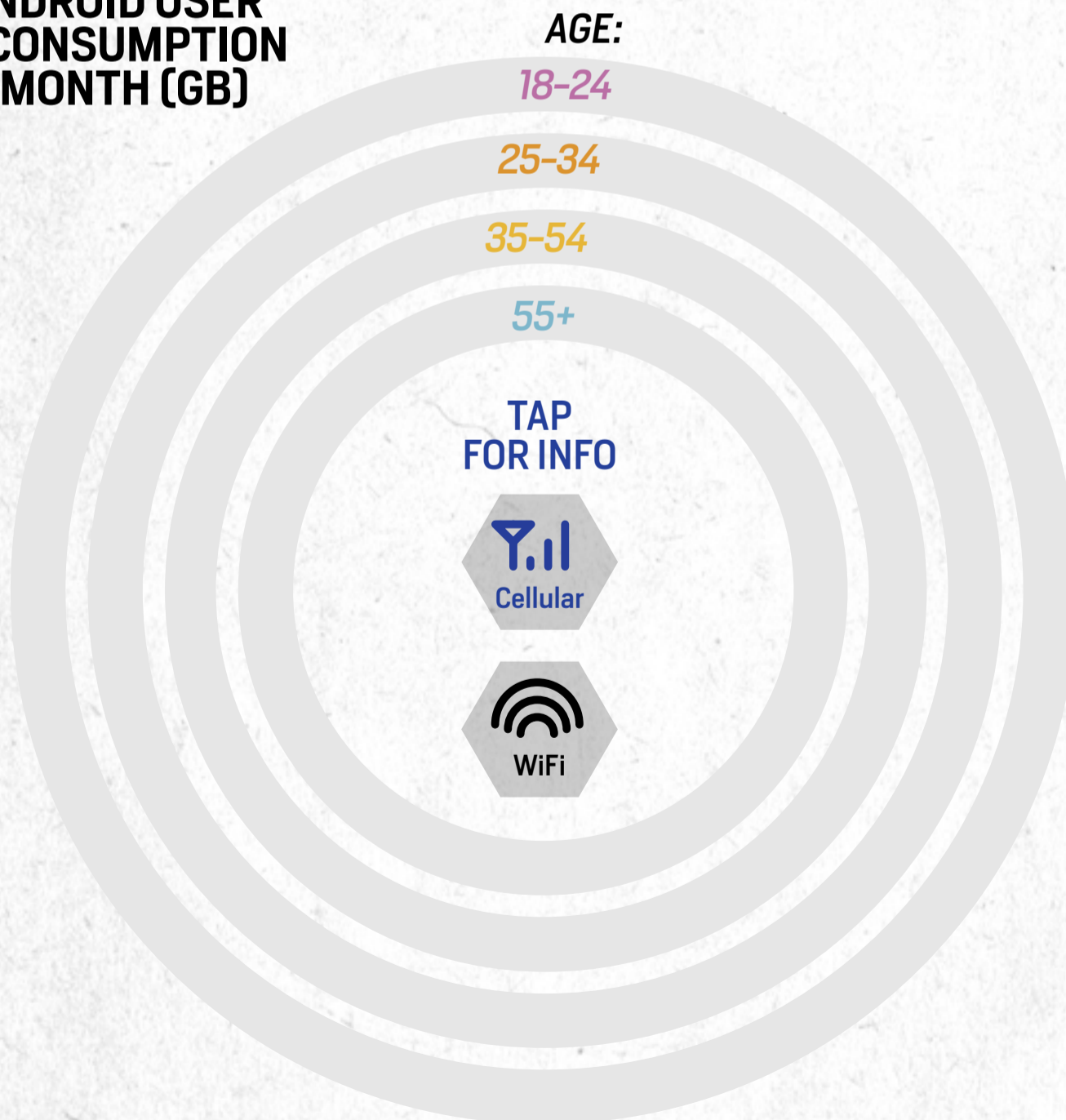


The Age of Android's Appetite

Ever wonder how much data you burn through every month on average? If you're an Android user within the US, odds are that it's quite a lot. The NPD Group estimates that Americans of the Google persuasion typically consume about 870MB of data on cellular networks every month. While it's not an extreme amount next to the 2.5GB of WiFi usage, it's enough to give anyone second thoughts about coasting on a basic data plan — and a reflection of how both 4G and media

apps have changed our behavior. Not surprisingly, it's a younger crowd more comfortable with smartphones that's the most aggressive: the 18 to 24 set races through 1.05GB a month whereas the 55-plus audience uses a more modest (if still healthy) 750MB. We don't yet know how iOS stacks up in current conditions, but the NPD is promising a comparable look soon. Something tells us the iPhone 5's LTE will lead to just as much voraciousness. — *Jon Fingas*

US ANDROID USER DATA CONSUMPTION PER MONTH (GB)





Glass Works: How Corning Created the Ultrathin, Ultrastrong Material of the Future

By Bryan Gardiner
Wired

It's almost taken for granted now that any decent smartphone or tablet will have Corning's Gorilla Glass (or some equivalent) adorning its front, but it wasn't all that long ago that far less durable screens were the norm. In this exhaustive piece for *Wired*, Bryan Gardiner looks at how Corning, an American company founded in 1851, came to be such a major player in the consumer electronics industry. In doing so, Gardiner traces as far back as the accidental experiment that gave birth to CorningWare dishes, all the way up to the now-famous meeting between its CEO and Steve Jobs while Apple was developing the iPhone — not to mention the company's breakneck growth in the years since. Not surprisingly, those developments all came with some considerable challenges, which are also discussed at length, along with just about all the details you could ask for on the glass itself.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF CORNING



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stories

More Human Than Human: How Philip K. Dick Can Change Your Life

By Jesse Hicks
The Verge

Philip K. Dick may still not quite be a household name, but there's no question that his status has grown considerably in, say, the 10 years since Steven Spielberg's *Minority Report*. Here, Jesse Hicks looks at PKD's continued (and growing) influence, which was more evident than ever at last month's Philip K. Dick Festival in San Francisco.

Computer Love: Looking Back at *Star Trek: The Next Generation* on its 25th Anniversary

By Brian Phillips
Grantland

Want to feel old? Consider for a moment that *Star Trek: The Next Generation* is now older than the original series was when *TNG* premiered in 1987. If you're still in for a bit more reminiscing, you can't go wrong with this look back at the series from *Grantland's* Brian Phillips, which examines the show's ideas and technology 25 years after its debut.

How Much Tech Can One City Take?

By David Talbot
San Francisco Magazine

The notion of "too much tech" is one problem that a lot of cities would no doubt like to have, but as *Salon* founder David Talbot suggests in this essay, it's a situation that's presenting some unique challenges for San Francisco, where some companies are leaving while others remain disconnected from the city and its culture.



PC LOAD LETTER? WHAT THE F*** DOES THAT MEAN?



DISTRO
10.05.12

FORUM

THIS IS THE
MODEM WORLD

BY JOSHUA FRUHLINGER

THERE WAS A TIME — early in my computing career — that your average printer could output better results than any screen could. In the days before WYSIWYG word processors, we would guess what the printed product might look like and then let an Okidata monstrosity scream out ugly 5 x 7 dot matrix results.

When it worked, it worked well, and we were thrilled that our 16KB machines could make something real. A continuous ream of paper was fed into the printer and we'd happily tear the perforated pages apart like birthday gifts from the digital deities.

But when printers failed, they failed gloriously. The paper would crumple like a multi-car pileup until we found the right panic button — the printers then had no way of knowing things were going sour — and it resulted in a maw of ink and sorrow that made us long for the

simple days of IBM Selectrics.

So here we are, 29 years later. We've moved on from dot matrix to laser or inkjet and things are so much better. Printers are so reliable now. They never fail. Printers are great.

No.

Despite all the other advances we've made in reliability and usability, printers are still stuck in a fiery underworld spiked with prickly pain points and endless troubleshooting loops.

“PC load letter? What the f*** does that mean?”



Have I just been cursed with lemon printers throughout my entire life?

We feel your pain, Michael Bolton, we really do.

Just this weekend, I took it upon myself to design and print some info guides for my upcoming wedding. The layout part went well: I put together a simple color, two-sided tri-fold brochure in basic page-layout software.

I had recently picked up a fresh, new and sleek printer that I was sure — given its sexy appearance — would handle the job without issue. Unfortunately, I was returned to the screaming dot matrix, PC load letter, paper jam days of the past.

Of course, the printer immediately jammed on the first piece of paper.

“No problem,” I figured. My printer has a handy paper-feed cleaning process that I ran and it seemed to do the trick.

So I was off to the races, right? Not so fast, turbo.


Turns out modern ink jet cartridges, despite their \$60 price tags, are good for about 50 pages of full-color printing. That’s more than \$1 a page. Sure, if I was printing like a normal person and not using all those colors and double-sided printing, I could get much more out of my

cartridge, but I had to go and be all fancy with my silly wedding brochure.

So I bought another cartridge. I spent the rest of the day monitoring the printing process, clearing paper jams, cleaning the heads every 20 or so pages and generally feeling anxious about the task of dealing with paper.

I don’t print things often. In fact, I try to keep as paperless an office as possible. But there are times when we must deal in the physical world: boarding passes, legal documents, wedding brochures, etc. When I do need to print something out, I expect it to go as smoothly as turning a monitor on. Is that too much to ask?

Why have printers lagged so far behind in terms of technology? All we really have to show for the past few years is wireless printing and sexier form factors. Reliability, it seems, is still a game. Is there not enough competition? Have we, as consumers, been trained that \$60 ink cartridges and paper jams are just how things go?

Or have I just been cursed with lemon printers throughout my entire life? Are there printers out there that just work? 



HAIL TO THE HYBRIDS



DISTRO
10.05.12

FORUM

SWITCHED
ON

BY ROSS RUBIN

IN THE WORLD according to Apple, there are OS X-based Macs and iOS-based iPads and, as it stands now in the era of disparate kitchen appliances, never the twain shall meet, even if they tend to borrow features from each other. Point the finger of blame at synthetic pointing devices that offer precision at the expense of intimacy. Google has played it a little looser with its two-pronged operating system strategy. It has reserved Chrome OS for such traditionally touch-deficient computing form factors as desktops and notebooks while allowing

Android to support keyboards and mice. However, as Switched On noted nearly a year ago, we've seen few pure clamshells that use Android.

Microsoft, however, has thrown these distinctions out the window, or at least *with* Windows. The latest release of its PC operating system seeks to dissolve the interface differences between laptops and tablets. It will appear on

both types of devices as well as touch-enabled all-in-ones and desktops. But Windows 8 — with its tablet-friendly face and ability to run traditional productivity applications — will also turn more PC manufacturer attention toward portable devices that live somewhere between a completely unadorned tablet and a notebook. We can expect two main kinds of these hybrids.



Convertibles lie closer along the spectrum to notebooks than tablets.

CONVERTIBLES

Convertibles lie closer along the spectrum to notebooks than tablets in that their keyboards remain attached, but PC vendors will primarily employ a range of hinge tricks to allow the devices to be held like a tablet. These devices will tend to have larger screens and because of the inability to detach the keyboard, will be heavier.

Some of the earliest Tablet PCs embraced this design philosophy, many with a single rotating hinge upon which the display was twisted to convert from closed clamshell to exposed display. This also allows the device to be used for presentations in open clamshell mode, although this has always seemed like the computing equivalent of the goofy Blind Man's Bluff poker game where players keep a card on their foreheads.


Back at CES 2012, though, Lenovo showed off one of the first Windows 8 convertibles — the Yoga. The unassuming laptop uses a 360-degree hinge to fold the keyboard behind the screen, which disables input from the keys and trackpad when so positioned to prevent accidental entries. Meanwhile, Dell has beefed up the processor and screen size

from its Inspiron Duo netbook to create the 12-inch XPS Duo designed for Windows 8.

DETACHABLES

PC vendors consider these tablets — and they can certainly function as one. However, they will also be bundled with detachable keyboards, some of which may have the ability to charge the tablet when docked and many of which will lock into the tablet for a secure carry unlike many iPad options. The ASUS Transformers have pioneered this approach with Android, but such a path will be less of an exception among Windows tablets. Indeed, HP has already shown off the Envy X2 detachable tablet that locks into a matched keyboard. It's a convincing ultraportable notebook impersonation given away mostly by a bit of a hump at the hinge.

As always with PC tablets, just as with today's iPads and Android tablets, you'll be able to roll your own combinations as well, piecing together cases, stands and Bluetooth pointing devices and keyboards. But there should be less need to do so for those who want to seamlessly switch from desk to duvet. Indeed, these kinds of devices may be the best showcases for Windows 8.

The iPad was introduced as a device that bridged the gap between smartphones and notebooks. Hybrids don't really aim to fill the one between tablets and notebooks, but rather extend each to serve more of the use cases of the other. 



ON FRANCHISES AND FALLIBILITY



DISTRO
10.05.12

FORUM

REACTION
TIME

BY LUDWIG KIETZMANN

THE INTERNET-BORNE RESPONSE TO THIS week's arrival of *Resident Evil 6* has been illuminating. A surprising number of critics are ready to cast the game into a bonfire, and some incredulous fans wish the reviewers would join it. There's a perceptible feeling of disbelief amongst everyone involved, as if such a big, glossy production — with hundreds of developers behind it — could never lead to divided, divisive opinions.

It's happened before, of course, with *Assassin's Creed* in 2007. But that game landed with different expectations, its future as a franchise uncertain. The historical action game won fans and detractors in almost equal numbers, and went on to become one of Ubisoft's most powerful and most nurtured franchises. Players expect *Assassin's Creed III* to maintain the upward curve of quality, and the game's familiar mechanics and motifs make a massive critical failure unthinkable.

Therein lies the deceptive assumption of "AAA" games. With enough history, fan

feedback, financial support and developers, we expect a well-tuned machine to emerge every time. There's a balance in the dialogue between players and creators, however, and *Resident Evil 6* is a good (or bad, depending on your viewpoint) example of what happens when one drowns out the other. I couldn't even tell you if fans demanded too much, or if Capcom was too intent on placating them, to the point of ignoring their expertise.

Resident Evil 6 does not seem carelessly made. In fact, most reviewers seem to think that the presentation,



“The massive scales and sprawling budgets of games like *Resident Evil 6* offer numerous and noted benefits.”

whether related to the rich environments or improved acting from the game's unnaturally kempt cast, is the best it's ever been. The point of contention is in the game's split, trident-tip focus, and how it offers explicit, delineated campaigns for every kind of *Resident Evil* fan — those who like the more action-heavy progression of the franchise, those who crave a return to spooky mansions and old-school zombies, and those who love the over-the-top escape sequences that seemed so surprising in *Resident Evil 4*.

The overwhelming issue, which a significant number of writers identified, is that *Resident Evil 6* lacks a coherent vision. There's no clear stamp of an auteur, and its desire to be an all-encompassing action game isn't unique in the realm of big-budget games — everyone wants to be THE action game. What made the franchise memorable is slowly being eroded by the huge number of people that now have input on its ongoing direction.

5 NEW GAME RELEASES FOR THE WEEK OF OCTOBER 5TH



NBA 2K13

360 / PS3 / PC - \$60



Click
on game
to buy



NEW LITTLE KING'S STORY

PS Vita - \$40



RESIDENT EVIL 6

360 / PS3 - \$60



NIGHTS INTO DREAMS HD

XBLA / PSN - \$15



5 NEW GAME RELEASES FOR THE WEEK OF OCTOBER 5TH

“*Resident Evil’s* belly flop is a welcome sign that AAA action games can’t coast on being magnificent productions.”

The extensive marketing and brand recognition (furthered by *Resident Evil’s* successful line of film adaptations) assure a sales victory for Capcom’s latest game, and we don’t know yet know whether that’s good or bad in the long run. The level of vitriol being directed at negative reviews does suggest that the game’s uneven construction is something of a surprise, however, and that pointing it out is unfair to the considerable amount of effort that went into it.

The massive scales and sprawling budgets of games like *Resident Evil 6* offer numerous and noted benefits: these games must show longevity and worth and so quality is taken seriously. They’re afforded more time and manpower than some studios could even dream of, and the movie-like production values are in line with how longtime gamers would like to see their favorite medium progress.


Conversely, the lack of constraint, of no one person being able to say “no,” can be liabilities. These games can fall



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victim to a creeping homogenization, reflected in the mocked, constrained 7-to-10 scoring employed by reviewers. Is it because reviewers aren’t telling us how they really feel? Or is it because so many games hit a similar, acceptable level of production and all incorporate approved, familiar ideas?

In a way, *Resident Evil’s* belly flop is a welcome sign that AAA action games can’t coast on being magnificent productions, and can be faulted on holistic terms. Blockbuster games are the most like movies in this way — films are all similar in their fundamental construction and presentation, so they must be judged on their granular merits. The well-tuned machine — the one that takes hundreds of workers to run and caters to as wide an audience as possible — got the better of *Resident Evil* in this instance. It’s a cautionary tale, and one that will seem less surprising as budgets balloon and risks become unpalatable to the powers that be. 



REVIEW

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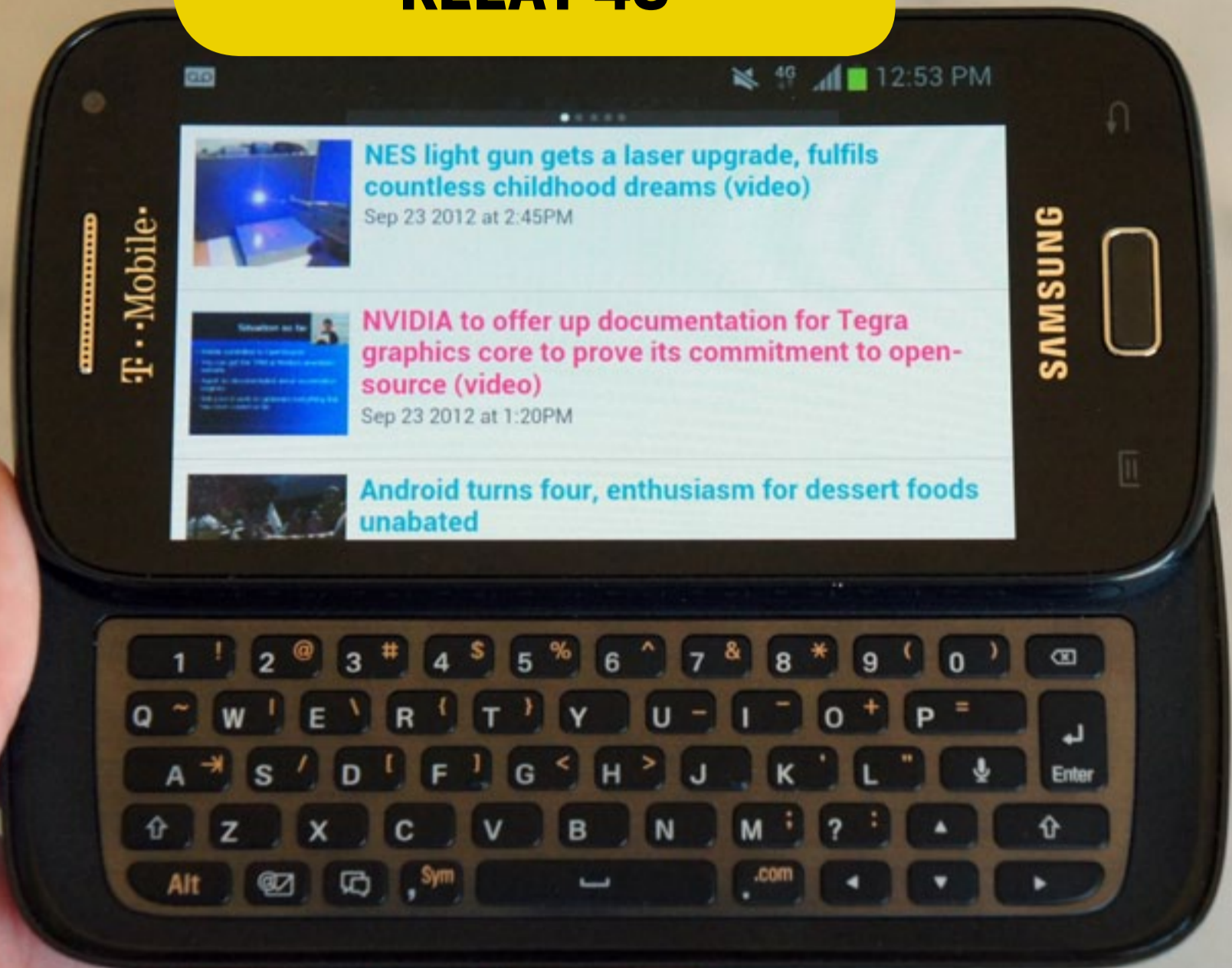
**Samsung
Galaxy S Relay
4G**



**Amazon Kindle
Paperwhite**



SAMSUNG GALAXY S RELAY 4G



The **Galaxy S Relay 4G** is the newest addition to the T-Mobile QWERTY roster, but will its main selling point be its downfall?
By Sarah Silbert

We first heard rumblings about the Samsung Galaxy S Blaze Q slider back in August, and what stood out most — apart from the rumored Qualcomm Snapdragon S4 processor and HSPA+42 connectivity — was that long-winded moniker. Interesting, then, that Sammy should re-brand the T-Mobile device with a name that does nothing to clarify this handset's identity: the Galaxy S Relay 4G. That jumble of words aside, this phone offers a five-row QWERTY layout, a dual-core S4 chip and a 5-megapixel camera with LED flash, all for the moderate price of



\$150 (with a \$50 mail-in rebate). Is this slider the best T-Mobile has to offer? Join us as we give the Relay the full run-through.

HARDWARE

The Relay 4G won't shatter your conception of a slider: at 4.9 x 2.5 inches (125.9 x 64.9mm) and 0.5 inches (13.4mm) thick, it has more or less the same brick shape of other handsets with QWERTY keyboards. At 5.3 ounces (150 grams), this phone isn't heavy compared to its competitors (the Motorola Droid 4 weighs 6.3 ounces, and the T-Mobile myTouch Q is a hefty 6.5), but the extra girth that comes with a slide-out keyboard means you'll never confuse the Relay with wispiest, touch-screen-only Android phones.

Much like the Samsung Captivate Glide from late 2011, the Relay is a relatively warm and fuzzy incarnation of a QWERTY slider. Competing handsets like Motorola's Photon Q 4G LTE and Droid 4 sport sharp, diagonally cut corners, and while that design choice may take away from the otherwise boxy dimensions, we prefer the Relay 4G's gently rounded edges, which conform to the palm quite nicely. A soft-touch, slightly dimpled backing also

makes for a solid grip, and indeed the Relay feels very good in the hand. The 4-inch display gives you decent screen real estate, but it doesn't push the reach of smaller hands to the limit.

Most of the phone's backing sports the soft-touch finish, which is quite similar to that of the Samsung Galaxy S Blaze 4G, though the bottommost part is done up in plastic and makes room for two tiny speaker grilles. The 5-megapixel camera and LED flash sit prominently on the device's rear side, with the Galaxy S logo etched directly underneath. The front side of the Relay is riddled with additional branding: Samsung's moniker sits right below the screen, and T-Mobile slaps its name across the top of the handset. What would otherwise be a pleasingly minimalist design is cheapened by all that labeling; we wish the carrier had shown some restraint and left out its logo.

The Relay's rounded corners allow for a good in-hand feel.



A large home button, along with smaller ones for Settings and Back, sits at the bottom of the phone's front face. The top of the front face is lined with the LED notification light, earpiece and 1.3-megapixel front-facing shooter. The 3.5mm headphone jack is up top, and the power button resides on the right edge. You'll find the volume rocker on the left edge, while the micro-USB port lines the bottom side. There is a microSD card slot for expanding the phone's modest 8GB of internal storage up to an additional 32GB, but you'll have to remove the backing to get to it.

Taking a look at what's under the hood, we have a 1.5GHz dual-core Snapdragon S4 CPU, 1GB of RAM and 8GB of internal memory. In practice, though, users will have access to about 5GB of on-board storage. The handset supports quad-band DC-HSPA+ / UMTS (850 / AWS / 1900 / 2100MHz) in addition to GSM (850 / 900 / 1800 / 1900MHz) for roaming the globe. (We'll get to network performance later.)

The Relay 4G's 4-inch display sports a WVGA (480 x 800) resolution and is made of scratch-resistant Gorilla Glass 2. We appreciate this extra layer of protection, but this is a Super AMOLED PenTile panel, and that in itself is enough to send shudders down the most hardcore screen buffs' spines. Truly, it's disappointing that Sammy's still stuck in Super AMOLED mode: we've been seeing basically this same panel since the original Galaxy S de-

buted in 2010. It might have been impressive then, but the bar has since been raised substantially, and this display on a \$150 device is downright underwhelming.

Yes, this screen isn't top-notch — pictures and text exhibit a subtle, but noticeable, blurriness. That said, the display isn't horrid, either. Viewing angles are wide and colors are bright and accurate, if not especially vibrant. But then again, take this guy outside and you'll be lucky to make out anything on the panel: it's perfectly acceptable for viewing email and browsing the web, but you'll want to turn elsewhere to get you outdoor reading — not to mention your 1080p trailer — fix.

KEYBOARD

A hardware keyboard entails some extra heft, but the idea is that you'll enjoy a more comfortable typing experience than cramped touchscreen keyboards can offer. We've seen that concept carried through on sliders like the Photon Q 4G LTE, whose keypad offers well-sized keys and a decent amount

The Relay 4G can only be described as a half-hearted attempt at an ergonomically pleasing device.





The slide-out keyboard feels solid, but almost too resistive.

of travel. But if that Sprint handset is a success story, the Relay 4G can only be described as a half-hearted attempt at an ergonomically pleasing device.

The Galaxy S Relay 4G's keyboard isn't completely flush with the rest of the deck, but it's not raised enough to let you find keys by feel, either. There's definitely a learning curve with this layout — and even accomplished touch typists may find themselves looking down at their fingers pretty often. Using a third-party typing test app, we notched shamefully low word-per-minute scores (read: less than 20 words

per minute when we stopped to correct our various mistakes). The keys are on the small side, but the real challenge to efficient typing is the flat layout: our fingers often hit adjacent letters or no letter at all. We do appreciate the keyboard backlighting, which, while not adjustable, helps for pecking out messages in low-light conditions.

Sliding the keyboard out feels smooth and secure — no creakiness here — but if anything, the mechanism offers too much resistance and requires a hearty push to open up and reveal the keys. That's probably better than an overly sensitive slider that moves at



the slightest touch, but we had the distinct sensation that we were mowing over keys row by row when we pushed out the keyboard, as if Samsung didn't leave enough room between the keyboard and the slider mechanism.

SOFTWARE

The Relay 4G runs Android 4.0.4, the most current version of Google's last-gen Ice Cream Sandwich OS. (We reached out to T-Mobile about an update to Jelly Bean, but the carrier wouldn't share anything on that front.) Of course, Samsung's custom TouchWiz UI is layered on top, but out of the box, the phone's interface is more T-Mobile inspired, with a white-and-pink background and no fewer than eight folders of apps — many of which bear the carrier's branding.

In addition to these folders, T-Mo-

bile widgets like Bonus Apps and Media Hub hog screen real estate with their ad-centric content. Luckily, you can send these suckers to the trash can, but you'll still find plenty of crapware in your apps list. You can disable superfluous built-in widgets like Bonus Apps and Game Base, and you most certainly should. Third-party additions include Lookout Security, Slacker Radio and a shortcut to Amazon.com.

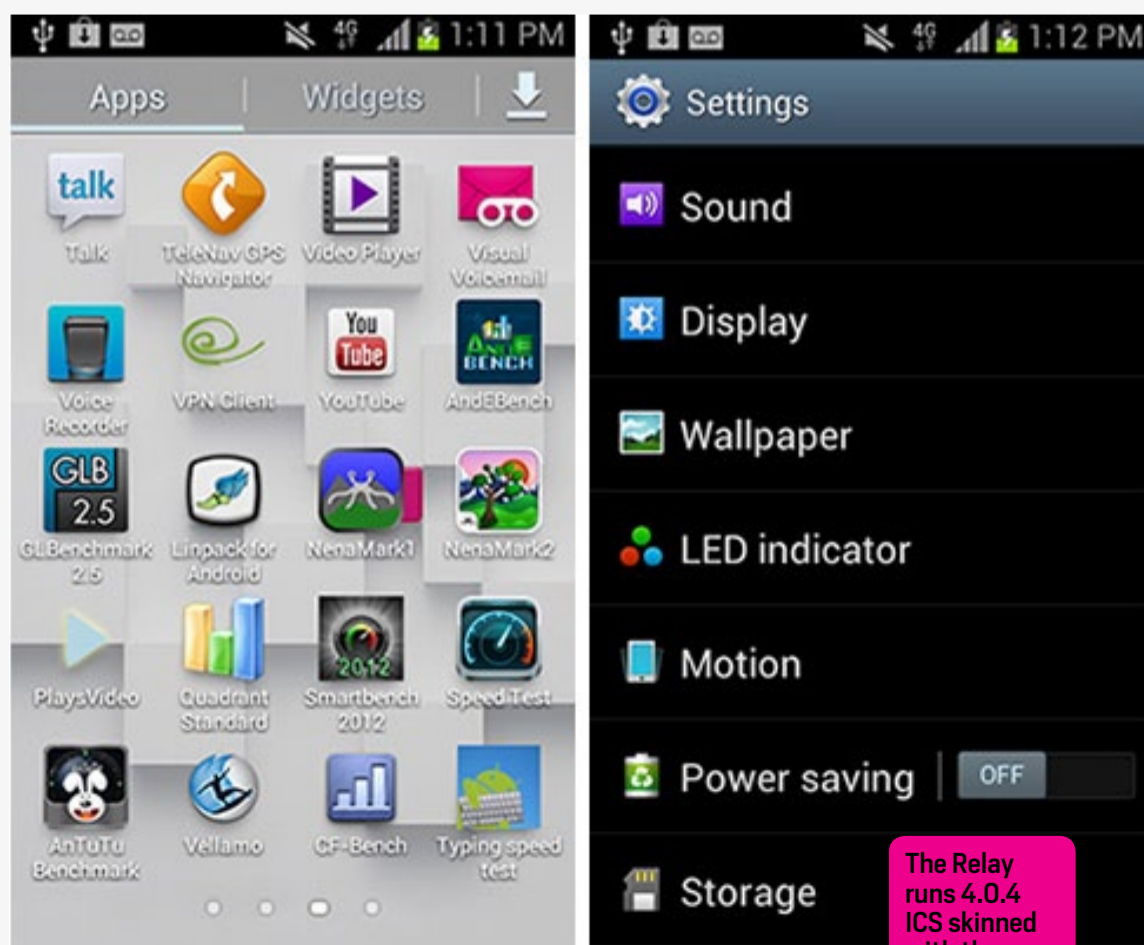
The Galaxy S Relay 4G carries Samsung's SAFE (Samsung Approved for Enterprise) designation, and it includes a few corporate-targeted features, such as VPN client for remotely accessing your computer network, AES-256 bit encryption and Microsoft Exchange ActiveSync.

Now is as good a time as any to mention that the Relay 4G supports NFC for sharing contacts and other content

with other enabled devices via S Beam, Samsung's tap-to-share utility. T-Mobile also offers WiFi calling for when you're out of the network's reach.

CAMERA

The Relay 4G's 5-megapixel camera with LED flash isn't impressive. We'll take a moment here to passive-aggressively point out that even some less expensive smartphones like





The Relay 4G's middling 5-megapixel shooter in action.

the Droid RAZR M manage to pack 8-megapixel cams capable of 1080p video. Shots that look crisp when viewed on the phone's display often translate into blurry messes once they make it to your PC or social network profile. Even when we tap on the part of the image we want in focus, the camera doesn't reliably render that area in sharp detail. Tap-to-focus fans though we may be, we'd recommend letting autofocus do the work: we got the clearest results this way. In general, sunny scenes come through with pleasing clarity, but cars and people in motion show up a bit blurry. Also, the shooter tends to render images darker than they appear in real life, and we found ourselves bumping up the exposure value when shooting in the late afternoon and in the shade. Camera settings aren't too in-depth — no HDR

here, for example — but you'll find ISO and exposure adjustment, several white balance options and a variety of shot and scene modes, including panorama and smile shot.

We noticed a one-to two-second delay when tapping the on-screen shutter button (there's no physical option here), which means that candid

pictures are out of the question. The phone's volume rocker doubles as the zoom in / out function within the camera app. Though images snapped during the day (or in other scenarios with ample light) show mostly accurate colors and satisfactory detail, nighttime shots that require the LED flash look blurry and indistinct. The camera is capable of 720p video recording, and we found it did a fine job of capturing motion with little jerkiness and no distortion. We shot our test footage in New York's always-busy Astor Place and our clip exhibits plenty of fuzzy, sometimes harsh, ambient noise.

You'll find fewer settings for the front-facing 1.3-megapixel — there are simply options to turn the timer on or off and to adjust the exposure value. When we made a test Skype video call over WiFi in our New York apartment, our partner's



face appeared clear at times and plagued by pink and green pixels at others, though of course results will vary according to your connection.

PERFORMANCE AND BATTERY LIFE

The Relay 4G's dual-core Snapdragon S4 processor and 1GB of RAM enable some zippy, fluid performance. Swiping through home screens, launching apps and scrolling through web pages is glitch-free, and the phone had no problem accommodating our *Riptide GP* sessions. The touchscreen is wonderfully responsive as well; we had to force ourselves to pull out the keyboard every now and then. Cold-booting into Ice Cream Sandwich takes 28 seconds, and once the phone is up and running it's almost immune to stuttering and other performance hiccups.

Benchmark scores echo our real-world experience. This phone keeps pace with other sliders, crushing the

Motorola Droid 4 and the Samsung Captivate Glide with their older internals but trailing the Photon Q by a small margin in most tests. The Relay 4G's Vellamo score of 2,734 is especially impressive, and indeed the stock Android browser loaded pages almost instantly; even with the maximum of eight tabs open, the phone rendered websites in 0.93 seconds.

On our battery rundown test, which involves looping a locally stored video with WiFi on and a few social network accounts set to send push updates once an hour, the Galaxy S Relay 4G's removable 1,800mAh battery lasted seven hours and 59 minutes. This is one area where the Relay makes other QWERTY sliders look half-baked: the Photon Q 4G LTE pulled through for just six hours and 18 minutes and the Motorola Droid 4 lasted a slightly shorter seven hours and 15 minutes. In our everyday use, which entails lighter video-watching,

BENCHMARK	SAMSUNG GALAXY S RELAY 4G	MOTOROLA DROID 4	MOTOROLA PHOTON Q 4G LTE
QUADRANT	4,430	2,755	5,036
VELLAMO	2,734	N/A	2,347
SUNSPIDER 0.9.1 (MS)	1,794	2,158	1,649
ANTUTU	6,707	6,134	6,942
GLBENCHMARK EGYPT OFFSCREEN (FPS)	60	N/A	56
CF-BENCH	8,845	N/A	9,562

SUNSPIDER: LOWER SCORES ARE BETTER



The Relay 4G's dual-core Snapdragon S4 makes for zippy, fluid performance.

email-composing and occasional picture-taking, the phone lasted about 11 hours — enough to see us through the work day and then some.

The Relay 4G's tiny back-set speakers pump out sufficiently loud sound that stops short of tinny, even if we can't call it clear or crisp. Listening with headphones is the ideal setup here, as audio comes through a bit richer. The speakers' placement, near the bottom of the phone's backside, isn't the most convenient in either portrait or landscape modes, since your fingers will likely gravitate to this edge either way. In terms of audio formats, you're good to go with .amr, .flac, .m4a, .mp3, .ogg, .wav and .wma files; we tried and failed to play songs in the .aac, .ac3, .aiff, .ape, .au, .m4r, .mka, .mmf and .npc formats.

When we made a few test calls on this slider, our friends on the other end said we came through loud and clear, and things sounded crisp on our side as well. In terms of network speeds, we saw a max of 15.04 Mbps downloads and 3.44 Mbps uploads on T-Mobile's HSPA+ network, with results generally ranging 0.7-2 Mbps on the uplink and 14-15 Mbps down. These numbers are

nothing to sniff at, and throughout New York City the 4G signal remains strong. We saw throughput on the upper end of this range when we took the Relay 4G for a spin in Southern California.

COMPARISON AND PRICING

If you need a physical keyboard, you know you're limiting your smartphone options. The Samsung Galaxy S Relay 4G costs \$150 with a mail-in rebate, but QWERTY fans on T-Mobile have a few other devices to choose from, including the myTouch (free with a two-year contract), which is a capable device even though it runs the outdated Gingerbread OS. And the Relay 4G is just one of several Galaxy S devices on T-Mobile: on the slightly lower end, there's the Samsung Galaxy S Blaze 4G, which runs Gingerbread on a 1.5GHz processor and like the Relay sports a 5-megapixel camera. Now that the price has dropped to \$100, it's a worthwhile contender. On the higher-end side — but priced at \$150 just like the Relay 4G — is the Samsung Galaxy S III. If the QWERTY layout is at all negotiable, this is hands-down a better pick.

Opening the door to QWERTY devices on other carriers, we like the Photon Q on Sprint, which, for \$50 more than the Relay 4G, offers a superior typing experience. On Verizon, there's the \$100 Droid 4, which runs Ice Cream Sandwich on a 4-inch qHD screen and also sports a best-in-class keyboard.



WRAP-UP

For a mid-tier smartphone running Ice Cream Sandwich, the Samsung Galaxy S Relay 4G is no slacker. Its Snapdragon S4 allows for smooth and fast performance, and battery life is none too shabby. Sure, the 4-inch WVGA display isn't tops and the camera is underwhelming, but \$150 doesn't buy you the stars.

What it *should* buy you is a comfortable, reasonably fast device that fits in well with your texting and photo-taking habits. If there wasn't a five-row QWERTY keyboard under the hood, our review would end on a higher note. But the fact that there *is* one naturally leads to some expectations about a better typing experience, and this device falls flat in that



This QWERTY keyboard is more of a set back than a selling point.

regard. If you want the extra set of keys, the Photon Q is a much better pick, and if you're open to going touchscreen-only, T-Mobile has plenty of superior devices — even within the Galaxy S lineup. **D**

Sarah is Reviews Editor, a wannabe tap dancer and a closet film critic.

BOTTOMLINE

SAMSUNG GALAXY S RELAY 4G

\$150



PROS

- Good everyday performance
- Comfortable grip
- Solid battery life

CONS

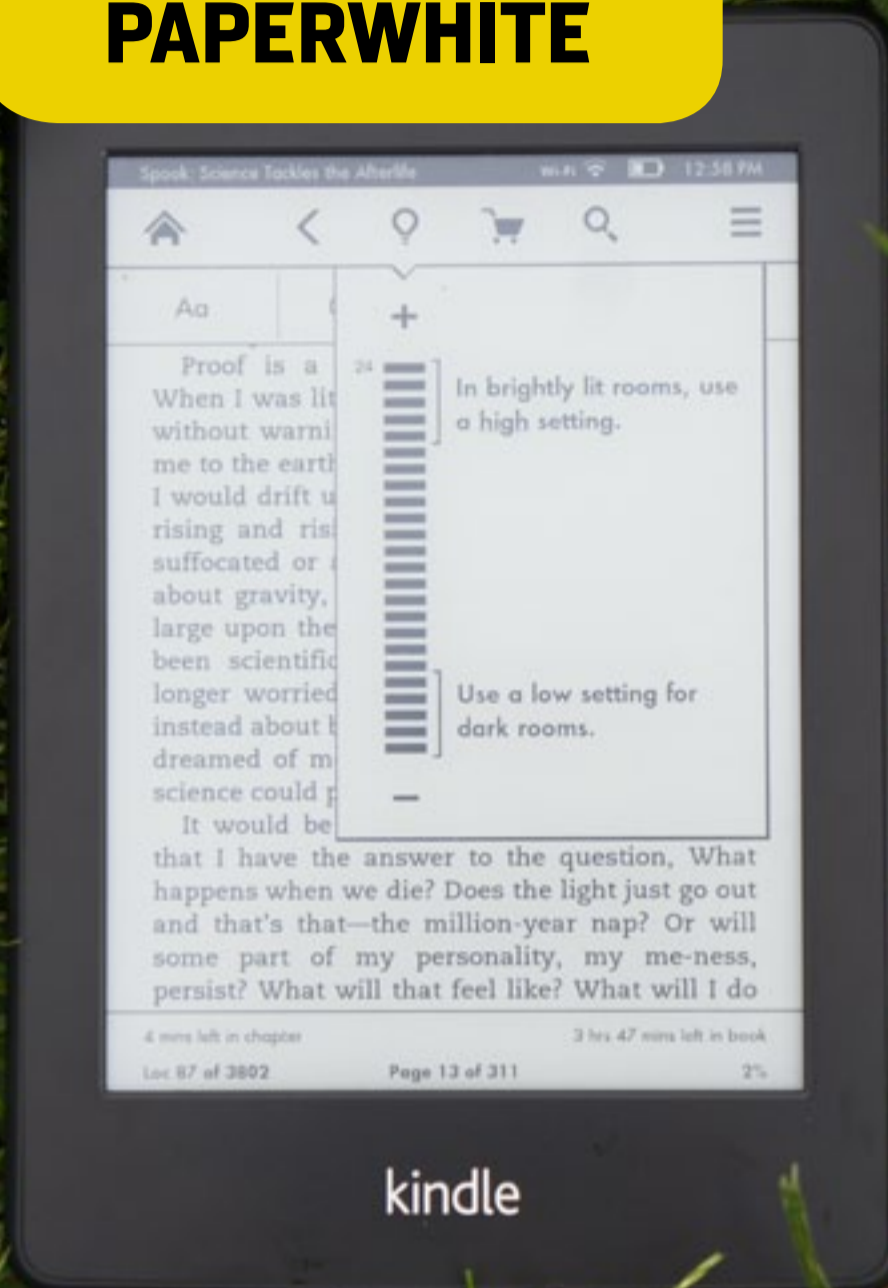
- Flat, nearly unusable keyboard
- Weak camera
- Cheap, overly branded design

BOTTOMLINE

The Samsung Galaxy S Relay 4G, T-Mobile's newest QWERTY slider, offers snappy performance and good battery life, but the uncomfortable keyboard is a dealbreaker.



AMAZON KINDLE PAPERWHITE



Amazon's new **Kindle Paperwhite** has been four years in the making, but does it have the stuff to extinguish B&N's **GlowLight**?
By Brian Heater

If you had told us at roughly this time last year that the e-reader race would be heating up going into the 2012 holiday season, we would have disagreed. If anything, 2011 seemed like the beginning of the end. Spurred on by the tablet explosion, companies like Amazon, Barnes & Noble and even Kobo were looking toward that space for inspiration, introducing flagship devices on which reading was just one of many features. Heck, even the readers themselves started to look more tablet-like, with many abandoning physical keyboards in favor of infrared touchscreens.



But here we are at the end of September, and this product category has never been more exciting. Back in May, Barnes & Noble captured our hearts and midnight reading marathons with the Nook Simple Touch with GlowLight, a wordy name for a great little device that made reading in bed at night a little easier. (A problem, according to Barnes & Noble, that was tearing the country's families apart.) But don't let it be said that Amazon doesn't believe in the American family. Earlier this month, the company launched the Kindle Paperwhite, the latest addition to a product lineup that has more or less become synonymous with the term "e-reader."

At that launch event, CEO Jeff Bezos described the four years of R&D that went into the front light technology powering that bright screen. It was clear from our hands-on time with the device that, although Amazon is placing extra emphasis on the Fire line these days, it still has a lot invested in the e-reader fight. The sharpened, illuminated text is impressive, and Amazon has gone so far as to describe this as the Kindle it's always wanted to build. That's all well and good, but how does it compare to similar offerings on the market? Is this

worth the \$119 asking price (with ads)? Let's find out.

HARDWARE

Even when it was first released in 2007, the first-generation Kindle was a bit dated — a big, bulky thing cluttered with keys and buttons. By the time the sleek third-gen model came out, it was clear that industrial design had moved up on Amazon's list of priorities. With last year's Kindle Touch, Amazon ditched the QWERTY keyboard, and now it's taking things a step further with the Paperwhite. There's a stark minimalism on display here: two buttons were clearly one too many, and as such, the company lopped off the menu button on the lower bezel, and replaced it with a lowercase Kindle logo. Only a single button remains: a small, lonely power button nestled on the bottom of the device.

We've bemoaned Amazon's aversion to physical

The power button is the only physical button to be found here.



buttons in the past, particularly in the case of the physical page turn buttons that used to sit on either side of Kindle e-readers. After all, touch is fine for most things, but an E Ink reader can freeze up, leaving the screen unresponsive to touch input. And then there's the fact that single-handed reading is a risky proposition, as anyone who gets to work on the subway will happily tell you.

You'll also notice that Amazon ditched the last-gen model's silver coloring in favor of an all-black design (much like the rest of the industry, we might add). The bezels on the front are made of the same hard plastic as the previous model, with a soft-touch material wrapping around the back. The material's becoming a bit of an industry standard on these devices, and we can see why: it feels nice beneath the fingers and offers some friction to help ensure you won't accidentally lose your grip during a particularly saucy "Fifty Shades of Grey" passage (not that we'd know). About a third of the way down the rear side you'll find another, larger Kindle logo. At the bottom are all the requisite FCC stats. For obvious reasons, Amazon has ditched the metal tabs used for connecting those optional reading light cases.

There are also no speaker grilles here, and the headphone jack has disappeared altogether, taking the dream of multimedia playback with it. On that bottom lip, you're only going to find the micro-USB slot (for charging and sync-

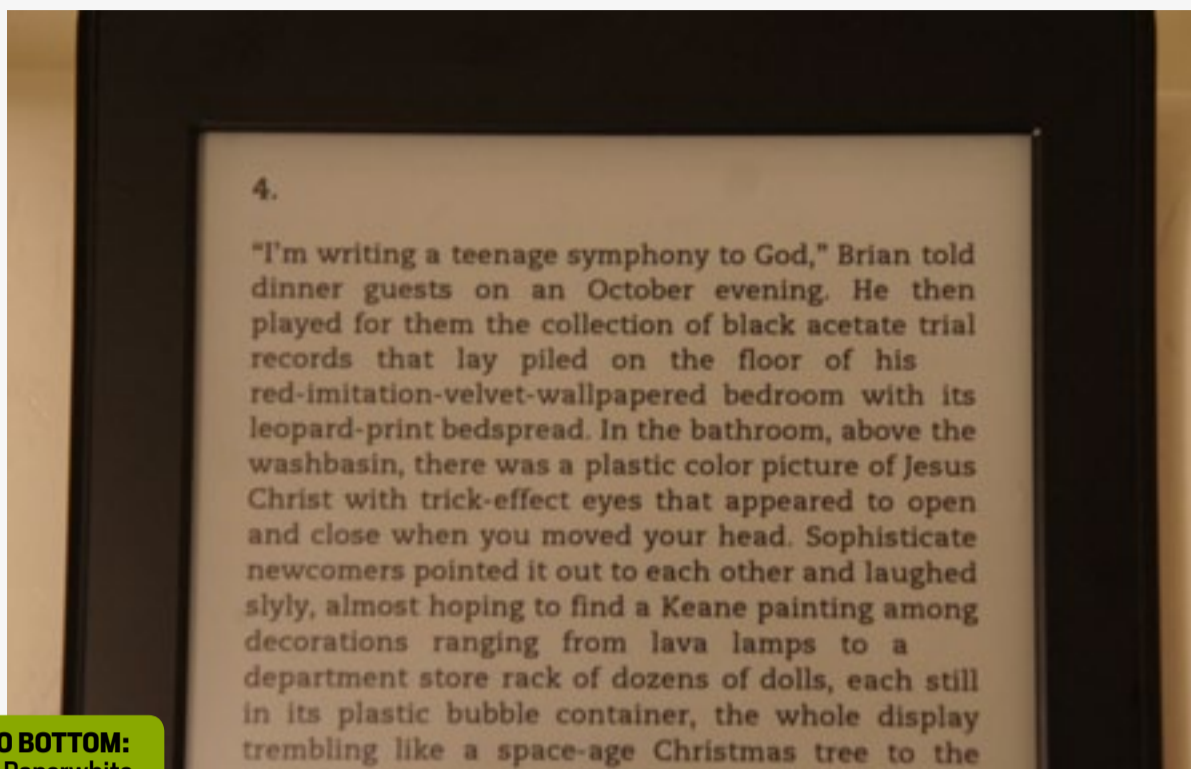
ing with your computer) and the power button, which you'll primarily be using for waking the reader up from sleep (the battery life is just that good). Of course, it will also come in handy on those occasions when a screen freeze necessitates a full reboot.

DISPLAY

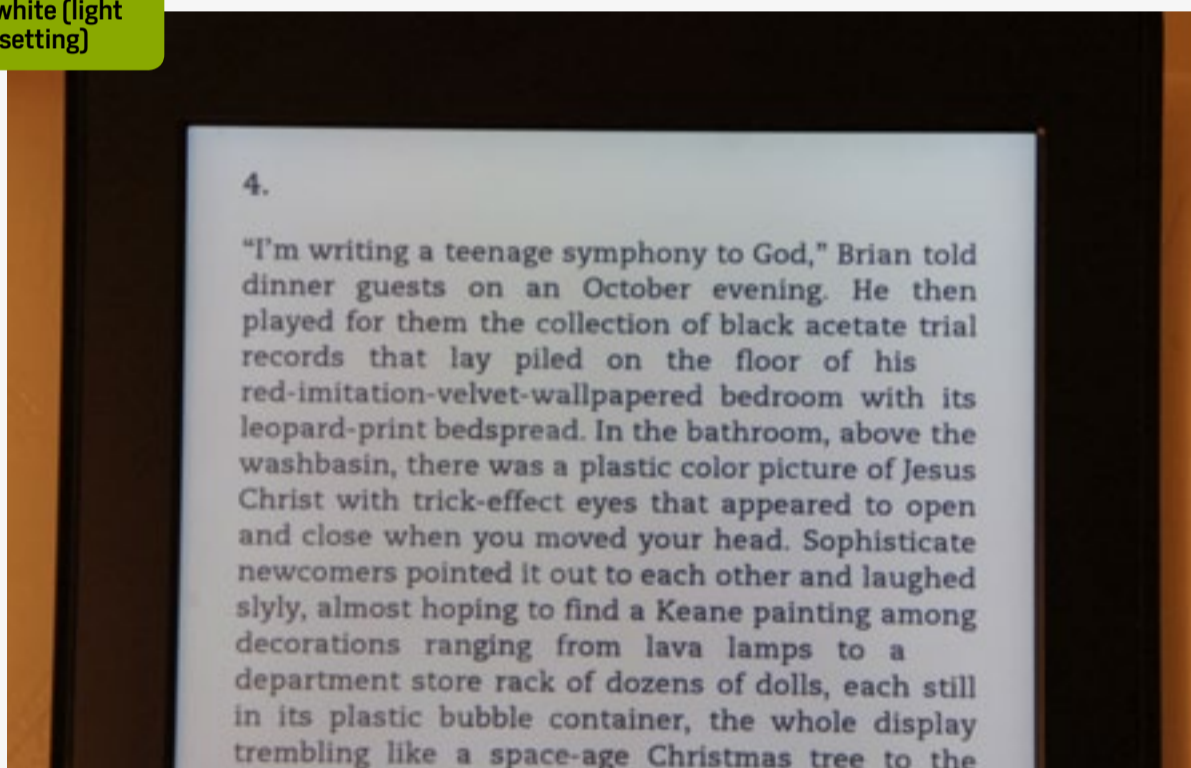
Paperwhite. It's a goofy name, to be sure, but it does get to the heart of why Amazon thinks *this* is the Kindle it's been striving to make since gen one: this device holds the promise of a crisper, easier-to-read display. The addition of front lighting is obviously a big piece of that, but there's more to it. There are also more pixels for Amazon to work with here — 62 percent more, according to the company's numbers, and the contrast, too, has been bumped up 25 percent. Even with the built-in light turned off, it's immediately apparent with the reader and its predecessor placed side by side on similar settings. It's a key difference between this reader and Barnes & Noble's offering. The Nook Simple Touch, on the other hand, loses contrast when bumped up to the GlowLight version, offering fairly uneven text throughout.

The thing is, you won't really have to worry about how the text appears with the light off. If Amazon's numbers are to be believed, you'll be spending all of your time reading with the light on, nighttime or no. The company says it paid special attention to selecting LEDs that didn't wear down the device's battery. By Amazon's own





TOP TO BOTTOM:
Kindle Paperwhite
(light off), Kindle
Paperwhite (light
at top setting)



That bodes well, we'd say. Of course, results will vary depending on what settings you've chosen. We were rocking it at full blast for a while (save for when it automatically shuts off to go to sleep, of course) with 3G turned on, and we did experience some perceptible battery drain.

What's also remarkable about the display is how evenly the light is distributed. Given the attempts we've seen at front-lit e-readers in the past, we were fairly impressed even with what Barnes & Noble was able to do with its patent pending Glow-Light technology. But,

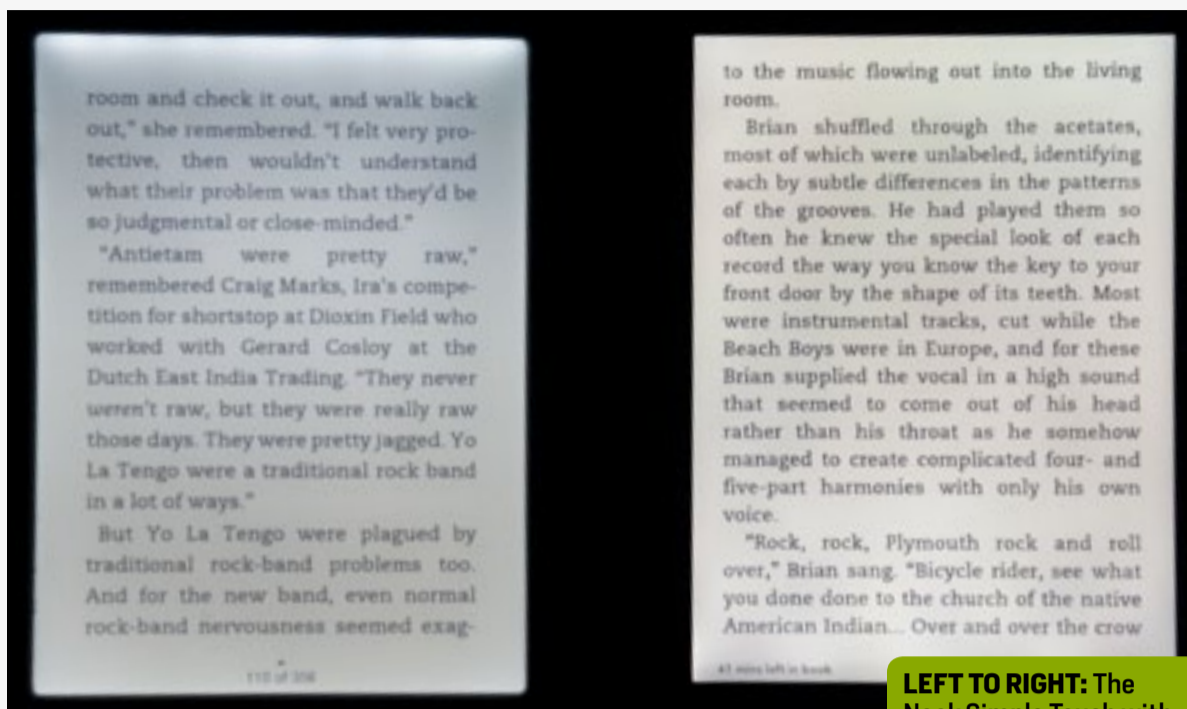
estimate, it's done a pretty solid job on that account: it rates the battery for eight weeks of reading time with the light on (at a little less than halfway, with the WiFi off, by Amazon's own caveats).

And if you had any doubts about how much confidence the company has in its estimates, note that the device's light turns on the minute you pull it out of the box and fire it up.

place it next to the Paperwhite and the difference is night and day. A quick look at the Nook shows a much brighter top, making it immediately apparent where inside the device the light is coming from.

Just in case you're still unsure, give the Nook a tilt and you'll see it clearly coming from beneath the bezel. Amazon, on the other hand, has managed to significantly reduce the gap between



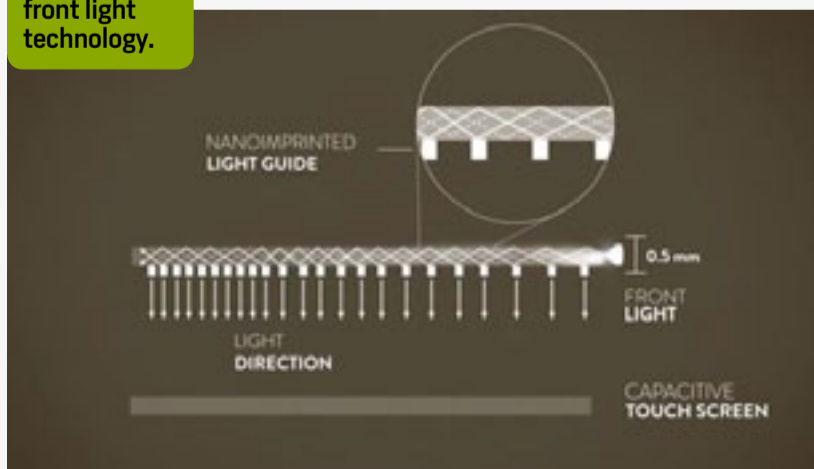


LEFT TO RIGHT: The Nook Simple Touch with GlowLight and the Kindle Paperwhite (each set to maximum brightness).

the bezel and the display. If you look for it, you can see the light source, but unless you peer closely, the light appears to be coming from all sides. Look carefully and you'll also see spots at the bottom of the display — when on a white page, with the light turned up to full blast. Under those conditions, you might notice some unevenness toward to bottom. On the whole, however, the light distribution is far, far more even than on the GlowLight.

Also immediately apparent is the “White” part of the this whole Paperwhite proposition. While the GlowLight's display has a

An explanation of Amazon's front light technology.



bluish tint, the Kindle Paperwhite deserves more of a Timex comparison. Okay, maybe that's a bit dramatic, but you get our point: the new Kindle's lighting allows for significantly whiter pages than what you'll find on the Nook and most E Ink displays, frankly.

How did Amazon achieve such a feat?

According to the company, the lighting technology was the result of nearly four years R&D (i.e., this isn't something the company just cooked up when it heard about Barnes & Noble's GlowLight). In explaining how the technology works, Amazon has described the setup as an optical fiber laid flat across the display, above the screen, accompanied by a nano-imprinted light guide that allows for even light distribution.

Of course, even with that hurdle overcome, the Paperwhite does still retain some of the issues we're used to encountering with E Ink displays. For one thing, we did encounter a bit of ghosting — more so than we've experienced on the Nook, even, but not quite as much as on the most recent Sony Reader. You still get a full page refresh every six pages or so, which has been the industry standard for about a year now. Still, full refreshes can be a lot more frequent in some cases.



SOFTWARE

Improving the reading experience wasn't simply a matter of tricking out the screen. The company's got plenty of new tricks on the software side, too. You're still greeted by a advertisement "Special Offer" (that is, unless you're willing to pay \$20 to make them go away). In the case of the Kindle Touch, starting things up was just a matter of hitting the Power button. With the Paperwhite, you'll have to also swipe the screen before you can gain entry. Simply clicking the button will only serve to turn the light on.

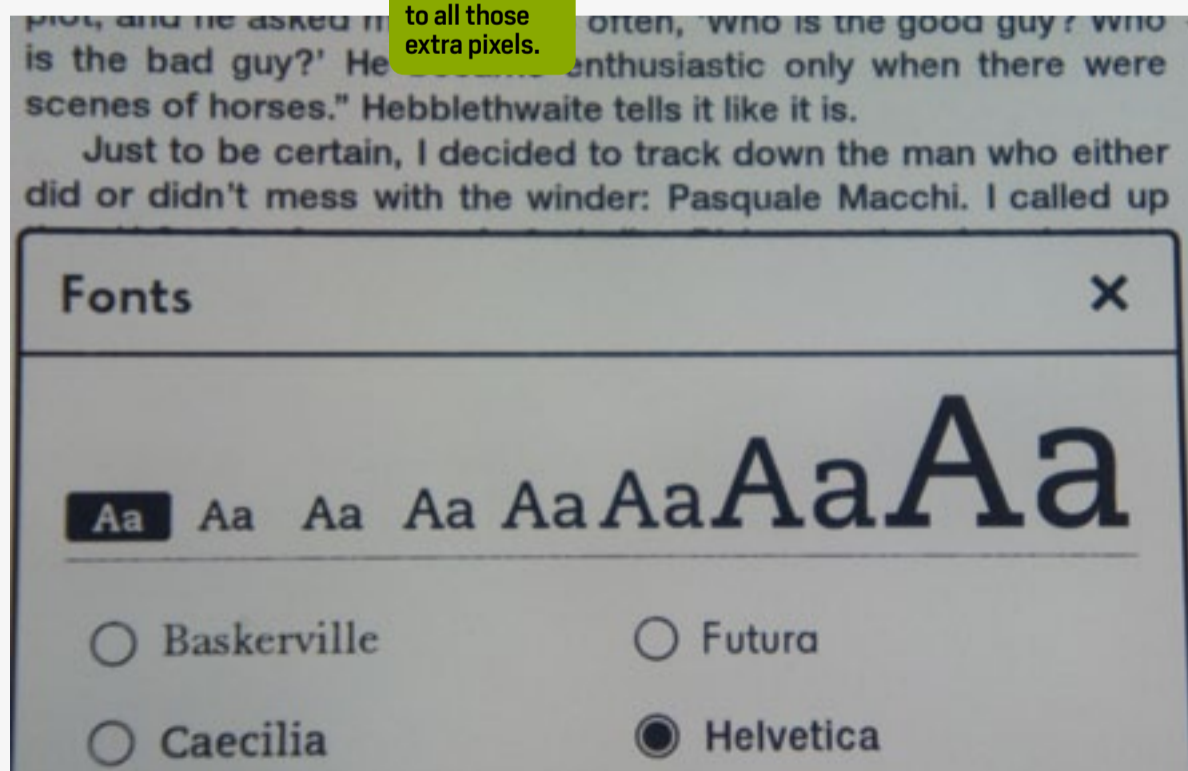
For the default home screen, Amazon's relying a lot more heavily on images, taking advantage of that increased pixel count with a row of three book covers, each of which represent your recent picks. Fresh downloads bear a "New" sash and take up a bit more screen real estate. You'll also notice a small dotted progress bar for a quick measure of how far you've read. You can access the rest of your download library by clicking just below these, and you can also mix things up and view by title, author or collections. Below this, you get a selection of "Singles," short stories that Amazon thinks you ought to buy for

\$2 a pop. These sit just above a small Special Offers banner ad — always be selling, Amazon, coffee is for closers.

At the top of the home screen, you'll see a black toolbar featuring your Kindle's name ("Brian's 3rd Kindle" for me — I'd have preferred something with more zest like BattleBook), your wireless connection (3G, suckers), battery life and the time. Below that is a row of browser-like buttons, including icons for Home, Back, Store, Search with various settings (like View Special Offers!) and adjusting the Light settings. Amazon has done a really nice job with that last one, offering up a sensitive dimmer switch with 24 notches, and a reminder to use a high setting for brightly lit rooms and a low setting for dark rooms, as unintuitive as that might sound.

Farther down are two links that let you toggle between books you've downloaded and titles stored in the cloud, a pretty great ad-

More font sizes are on offer here due to all those extra pixels.





After powering on, you'll also need to swipe for access.

dition that makes it much easier to access anything you've purchased but haven't yet downloaded to your new reader. Here, you get a library of big book covers. Clicking on one will start the download to the device, which has 2GB of non-expandable storage.

As for the store itself, the experience hasn't changed very much. Amazon's borrowed the browser-like toolbar from the home screen, whose large icons push things down the page a bit. The store looks a bit cleaner, too, as the company removed the gray borders between sections. What really counts, however, is selection, and Amazon's certainly got one of the best libraries. Amazon has always been cagey about giving hard numbers, though. Take a look at the company's press materials and you'll find fairly meaningless stats like, "over a million titles less than \$9.99."

And what of this reading experi-

ence we've heard so much about? We're glad you asked. As ever, it's all about the words: the text monopolizes a good chunk of the page. In the bottom-right corner, you'll still find the percentage of the book you've read thus far (we still prefer actual page numbers — though

you can access those in the menu). On the lower left, however, the obscure location number has been swapped out for the new "Time to Read" feature, which is exactly what it sounds like: an estimate of how many minutes it will take you to finish the book. The feature starts with an average number and then adjusts as it learns your reading habits. All told, a terrific new addition.

As mentioned, the increase in resolution and pixels means that the company can offer up even more font sizes and styles, making the text readable even at the smallest setting. This latest Kindle features eight text sizes, seven font styles (hellooooo, Helvetica) and three settings for both line spacings and margins. Text size can also be adjusted with a pinch gesture, though the motion is hardly fluid. Plenty of features have been carried over from the last-gen model as well, including X-Ray, which lets you find characters, places,



topics, etc. spaced throughout the book by searching on a given term. Setting a bookmark is as simple as tapping the upper-right corner of the screen. To highlight, hold down and drag. From there, you can add a note, look up words in The New Oxford American Dictionary, translate through Bing translation or share passages on Facebook or Twitter.

Amazon's still referring to its built-in browser as "experimental," and it's easy to see why. Surfing the web on an e-reader is still kind of a last-ditch solution, something you might do should your computer, tablet and phone all explode simultaneously. To use the browser, you'll have to turn on the WiFi, even on 3G devices — Amazon will pay for you to download all the books you want, but it ain't shelling out for you to surf the web. Between the display limitations and the stuttering required to scroll up and down a page, there aren't a lot of nice things to be said here — and in that case, it's not all that different from browsers on competing devices. We will say this: the addition of the large toolbar from the home screen is a nice touch.

As per usual, the device can display PDFs and docs. Here, it takes advantage of Amazon's handy Send to Kindle feature. Just install the application on your device and you can drag and drop files, which get sent to whichever Kindle tied to your account you specify. Amazon's estimate of "a few seconds"

is a bit optimistic, but it did take less than a minute before a PDF we sent ourselves popped up on our homepage. Once it arrived, we used the touchscreen to zoom in and scroll across the document — handy features for those who need to read word documents on the go, but don't want to rely on their tiny phone screen.

Amazon's also built in some parental controls here, accessible in the Settings menu. From there, you can restrict access to the browser, Kindle Store and the Cloud, requiring all users to enter a password to utilize that functionality — simple, but no doubt effective for parents looking to keep their kids out of monochromatic trouble.

WRAP-UP

So, do all of these features add up to the best e-reader out there? In a syllable: yep. Amazon was clearly focused on creating the best possible reading experience with the Paperwhite, and it's delivered. The screen adjustments are great — everything from the evenly distributed front light to the improved contrast. Meanwhile, the new Time to Read feature, coupled with X-Ray, Whispersync and Send to Kindle, further round out the experience. And, of course, there are perennial favorites like optional 3G and Amazon's vast catalog of content.

The Kindle's still far from perfect, though. For starters, it's simply not as pleasant to hold as the Nook Simple Touch is — it ultimately sacrifices com-





LEFT TO RIGHT: The Kindle Paperwhite and the Nook Simple Touch with GlowLight.

bonus feature? It's great that you're able to shave the price down to \$119 for the WiFi version and \$179 for 3G, and these ads certainly aren't as intrusive as some might suggest. Still, with the Nook Simple Touch with GlowLight now priced at \$119 without ads, it's hard to get behind paying \$20

fort for some aesthetic niceties. There's also the Kindle lineup's continued lack of expandable storage, though the on-board 2GB might well be enough for you, especially with unlimited cloud storage at the ready. And then there's the whole special offers thing. Amazon, can we stop pretending that ads are a

for an ad-free experience. Those caveats aside, though, the Kindle Paperwhite has once again made Amazon's e-reader the one to beat. **D**

Brian's work has appeared in Spin, The Onion, Entertainment Weekly, The New York Press, PCMag, Laptop, and various other publications.

BOTTOMLINE

AMAZON KINDLE PAPERWHITE

\$119+



PROS

- Great front-lit display
- Excellent contrast
- Useful new software

CONS

- Less comfortable to hold than the Nook
- Starting price includes ads
- No expandable storage

BOTTOMLINE

Amazon's added some great new features to its popular Kindle line by focusing on what it does best: providing a great reading experience.





LIVE



FROM

THE



2012

Paris



Auto

Show



and

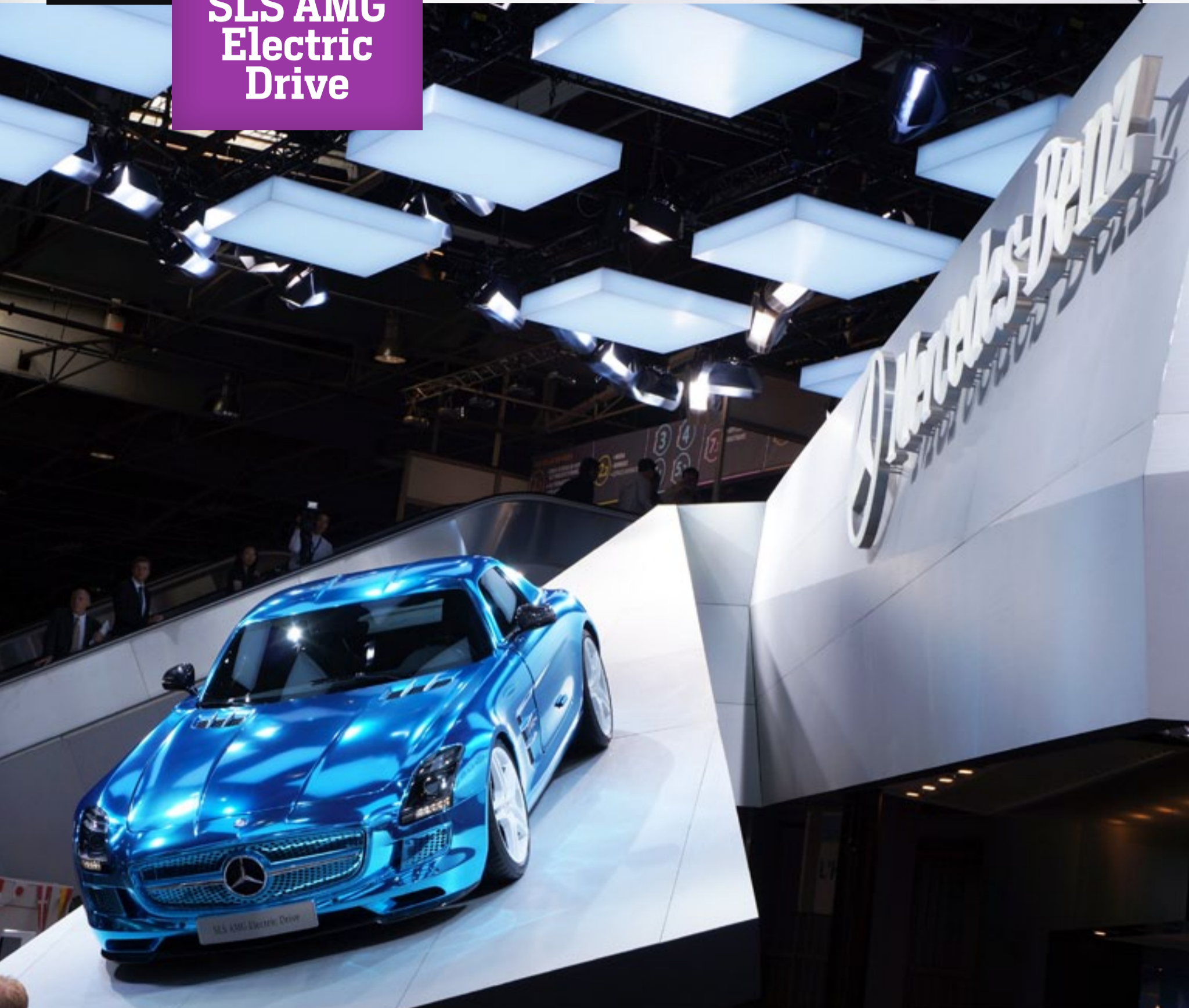
**Carbon Fiber
Concept Cars,
Candy-Coated
Paint Jobs
and a Drive-In
Theater for Two**



DISTRO
10.15.12

PARIS
AUTO
SHOW
2012

Mercedes- Benz SLS AMG Electric Drive



We've seen Mercedes' SLS AMG E-Cell at previous auto shows, but this year the company rolled out a shockingly shiny production-ready model, the SLS AMG Electric Drive. The 750-horsepower, fully electric car is set for release in June 2013 and will cost \$500,000.

TAP FOR FULL STORY





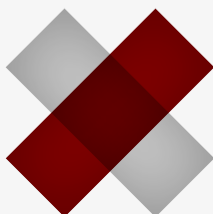
PARIS
AUTO
SHOW
2012

DISTRO
10.15.12

BMW i3 Concept

BMW showed off the key to its incredibly light (just 2,800 pounds) i3 electric car: a carbon fiber reinforced plastic (CFRP) chassis. The whole kit is still set for release in 2013.

TAP FOR FULL STORY



PARIS
AUTO
SHOW
2012

Lexus LF-CC Concept

DISTRO
10.15.12



Lexus' concept features a fully touch-sensitive panel in between the two front seats that replaces the clumsy, button-heavy center consoles found in many luxury cars. Think of it as a more organic evolution of the 17-inch touchscreen wedged in the center of the Tesla Model S.

[TAP FOR FULL STORY](#)



PARIS
AUTO
SHOW
2012

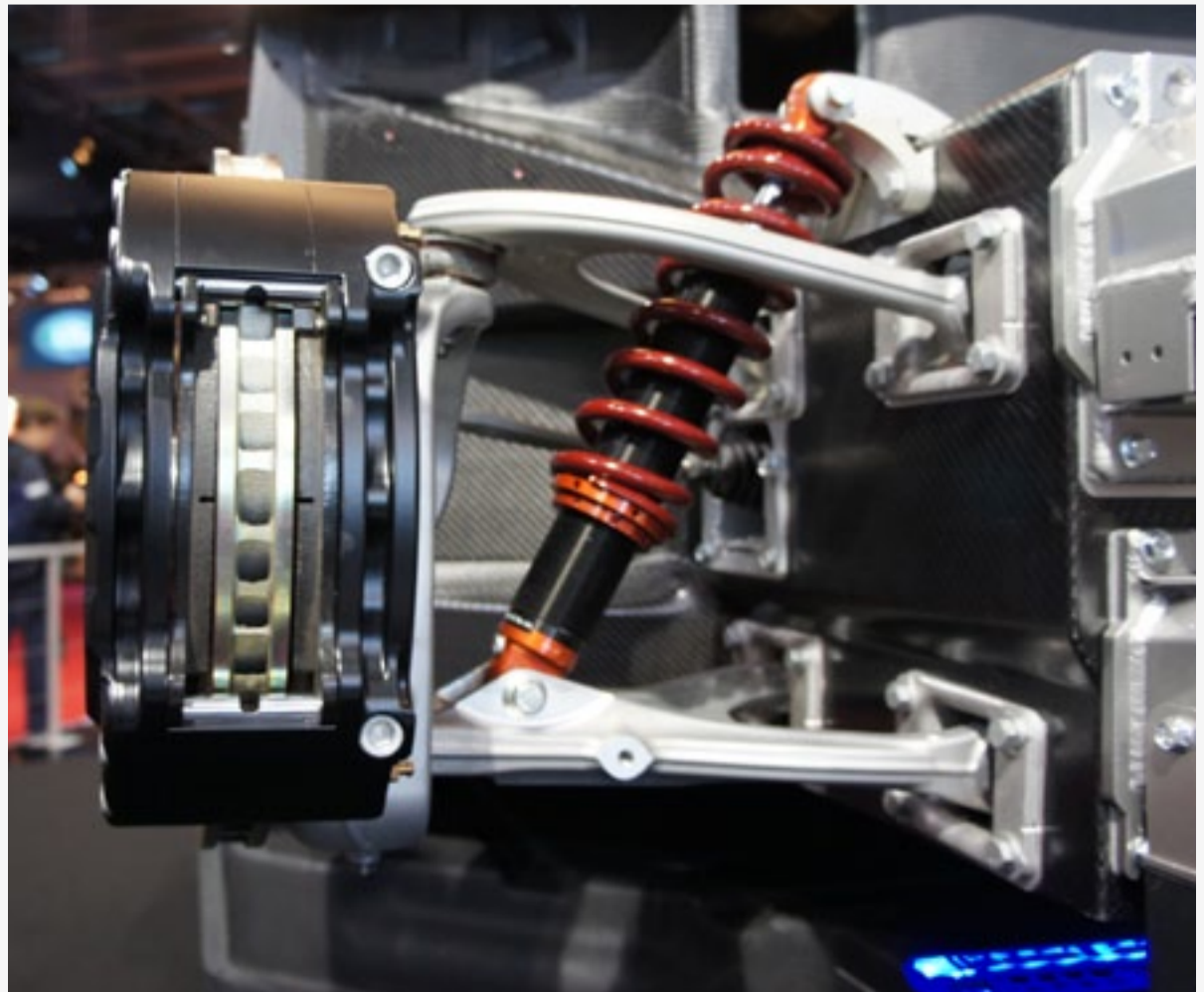
Exagon Furtive- eGT

DISTRO
10.15.12



This custom-crafted carbon fiber supercar doesn't come equipped with a price tag or release date, but it can go from zero to 60 in 3.5 seconds and, with its carbon ceramic brakes, it can pull 1.2G while doing a hard stop.

TAP FOR FULL STORY





Nissan Terra Concept

DISTRO
10.15.12

PARIS
AUTO
SHOW
2012



Like its cross-prefixed predecessor, the Xterra, and similarly quirky Juke, the Terra is designed to take the rougher road while cossetting its occupants in a particularly trick interior, featuring a dashboard that houses a removable tablet.

TAP FOR FULL STORY



PARIS
AUTO
SHOW
2012

Porsche Panamera Sport Turismo Concept

DISTRO
10.15.12



The Sport Turismo concept is a plug-in hybrid with a battery pack living in the rear hatch, which is, unusually, exposed to the world through a glass panel that turns clear at the touch of a button.

TAP FOR FULL STORY

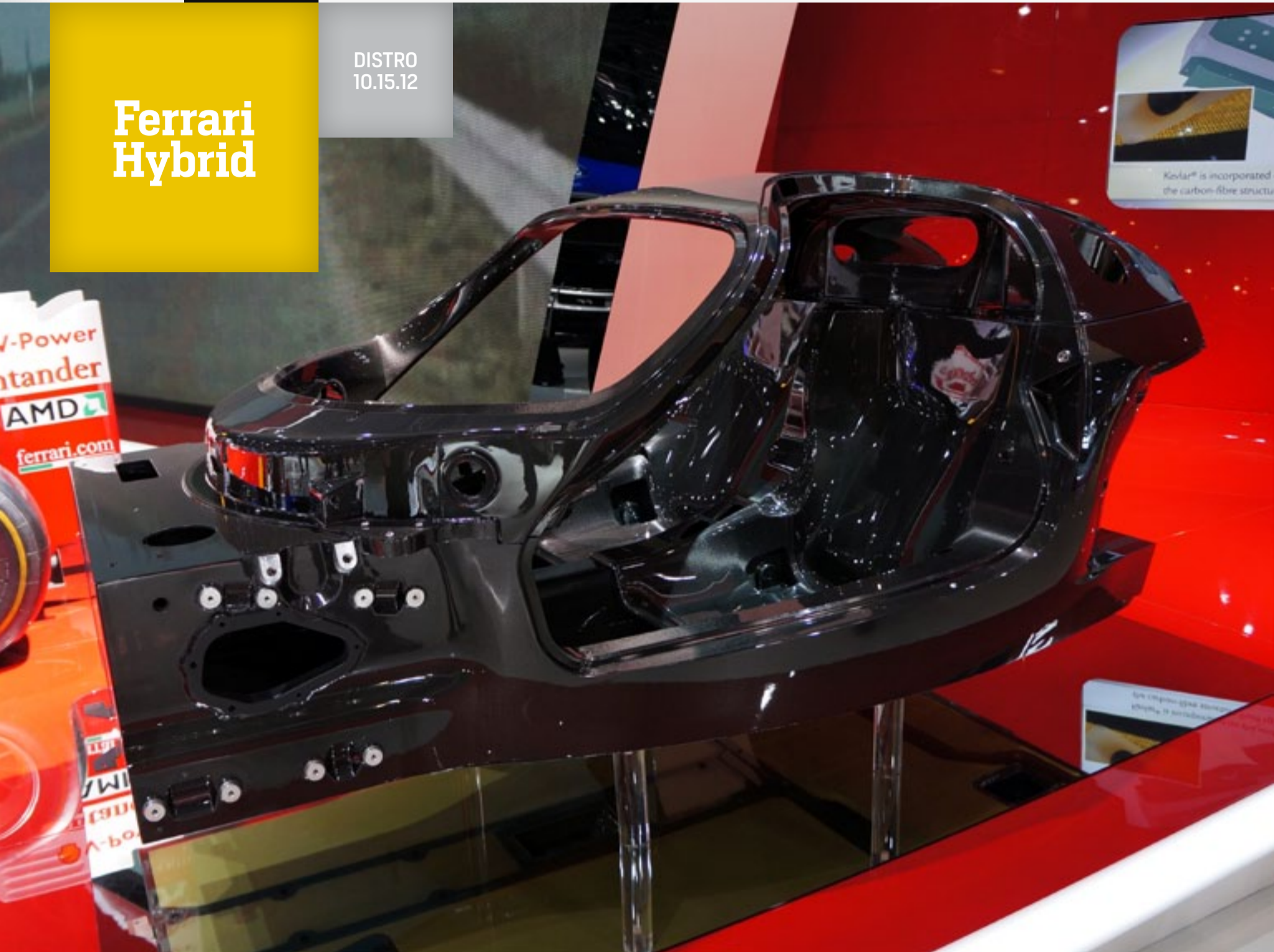


PARIS
AUTO
SHOW
2012

DISTRO
10.15.12

Ferrari Hybrid

V-Power
Antander
AMD
ferrari.com



It's still just a shell of a machine, and the company's keeping a lid on its name, but Ferrari did unveil the carbon fiber chassis of its first hybrid at this year's Paris Auto Show.

TAP FOR FULL STORY



PARIS
AUTO
SHOW
2012

Venturi America

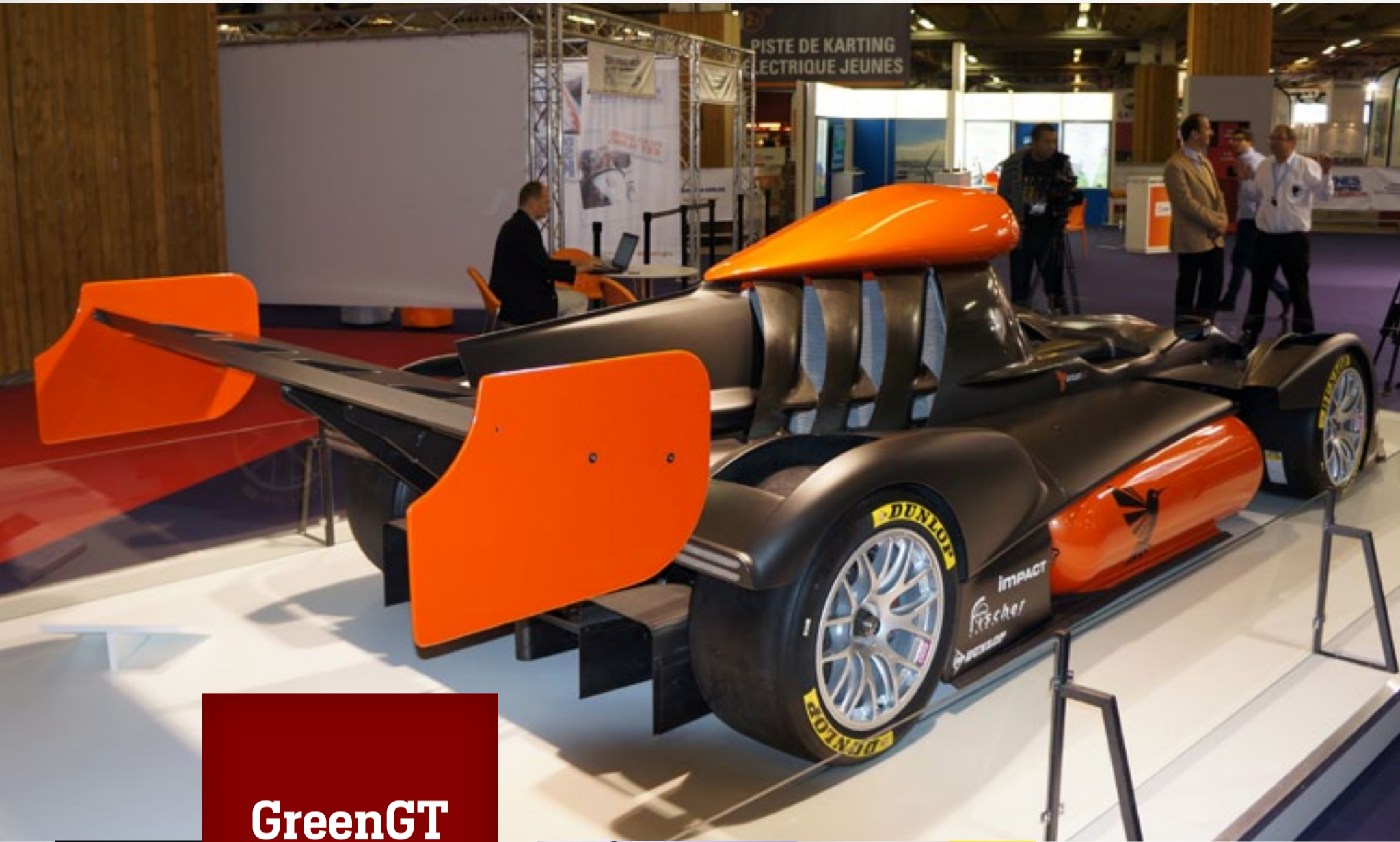
DISTRO
10.15.12



The Venturi America is a \$400,000 EV that packs a 300-horsepower powerplant, 53 kWh lithium-ion battery pack and projected 200-mile range to go along with the breathtaking price tag.

TAP FOR FULL STORY

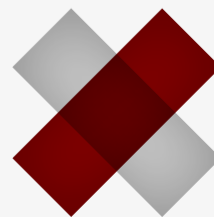




GreenGT H2

PARIS
AUTO
SHOW
2012

DISTRO
10.15.12



The GreenGT H2 EV will hit the track during next year's Le Mans as an experimental entry, driving the full 24-hour race pushing only water vapor out its tailpipe.

TAP FOR FULL STORY



Smart Forstars EV Concept

PARIS
AUTO
SHOW
2012

DISTRO
10.15.12



Smart's stubby concept has a unique feature packed into its grill: a projector that turns any blank wall into a drive-in movie theater with a little help from your iPhone.

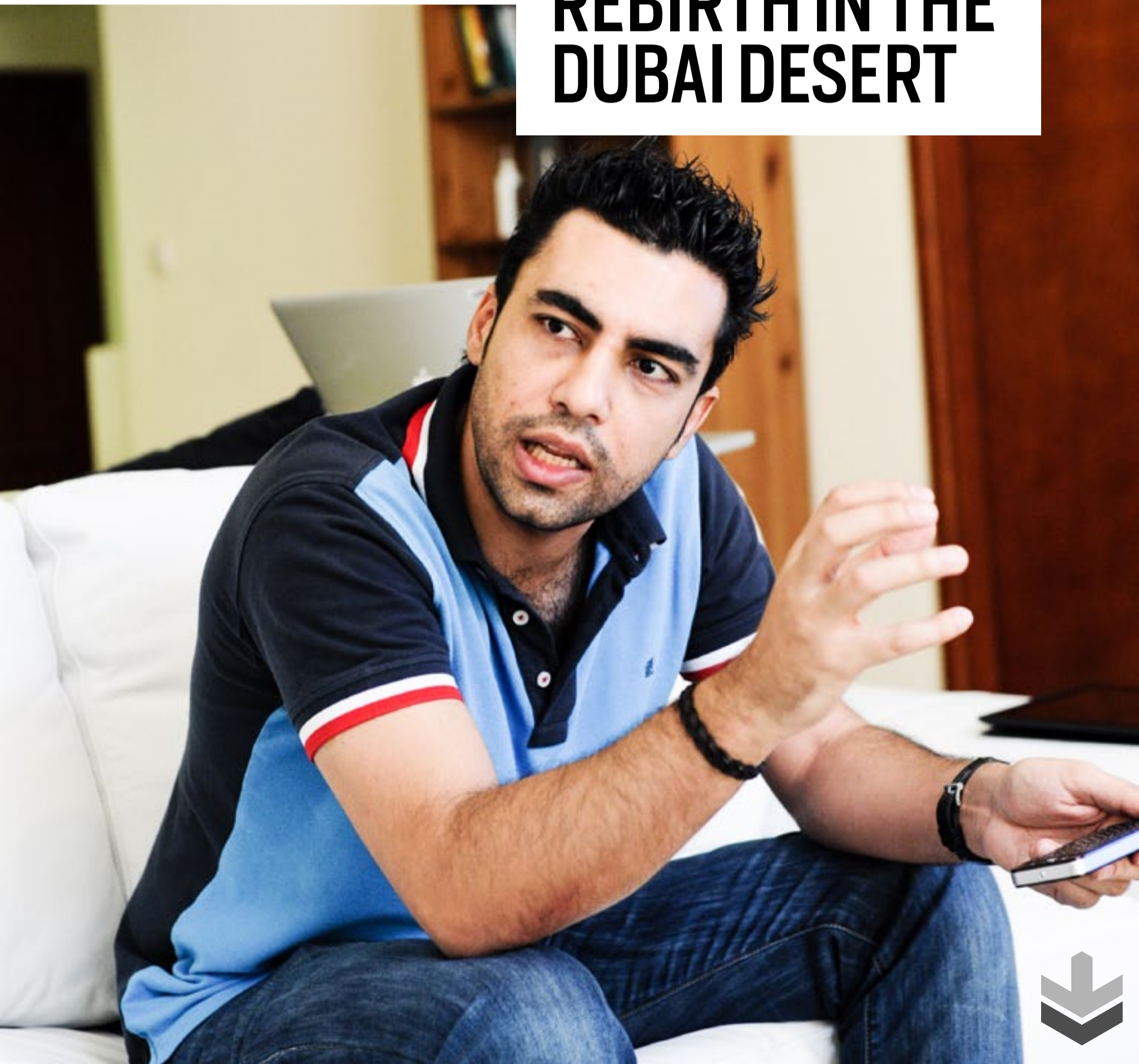
TAP FOR FULL STORY



THE HIGHS AND LOWS OF A TECH STARTUP:

By
Darren
Murph

KICKSTARTING A REBIRTH IN THE DUBAI DESERT



IT'S EARLY SEPTEMBER, a month out from an initially promised ship date that he knows he'll miss. "November is it," he says. "It absolutely has to happen in November. If we have to, we'll ship and work furiously to release OTA updates until we're satisfied." The man is Ahmad Zahran, the ever-motivated soul of Infnitec, and we're discussing the impending launch of his company's second product, the Pocket TV. In short, it's an Android-based HDMI dongle that puts the full realm of Android on your existing HDTV, and it'll ship with its own keyboard-infused wireless remote. It's pretty remarkable that we're even having this conversation. In early 2010, he flew himself to CES in Las Vegas to pitch anyone who

would listen on his Infinite USB Memory Drive(IUM) — a brilliant concept that fell flat when launched. The idea was to stream content from anything to anything using a mere USB dongle, but execution proved difficult.

Two years later, he's on the brink of realizing a second chance. He has over \$500,000 of Kickstarter funding, a prototype that functions before my eyes in near-final fashion and an opportunity to do something that was practically impossible a half-decade ago: start the same company up *twice*.

A mishmash of silicon and metal will one day become a commercialized product dubbed the Pocket TV.



THE LONG, DUSTY ROAD TO HERE

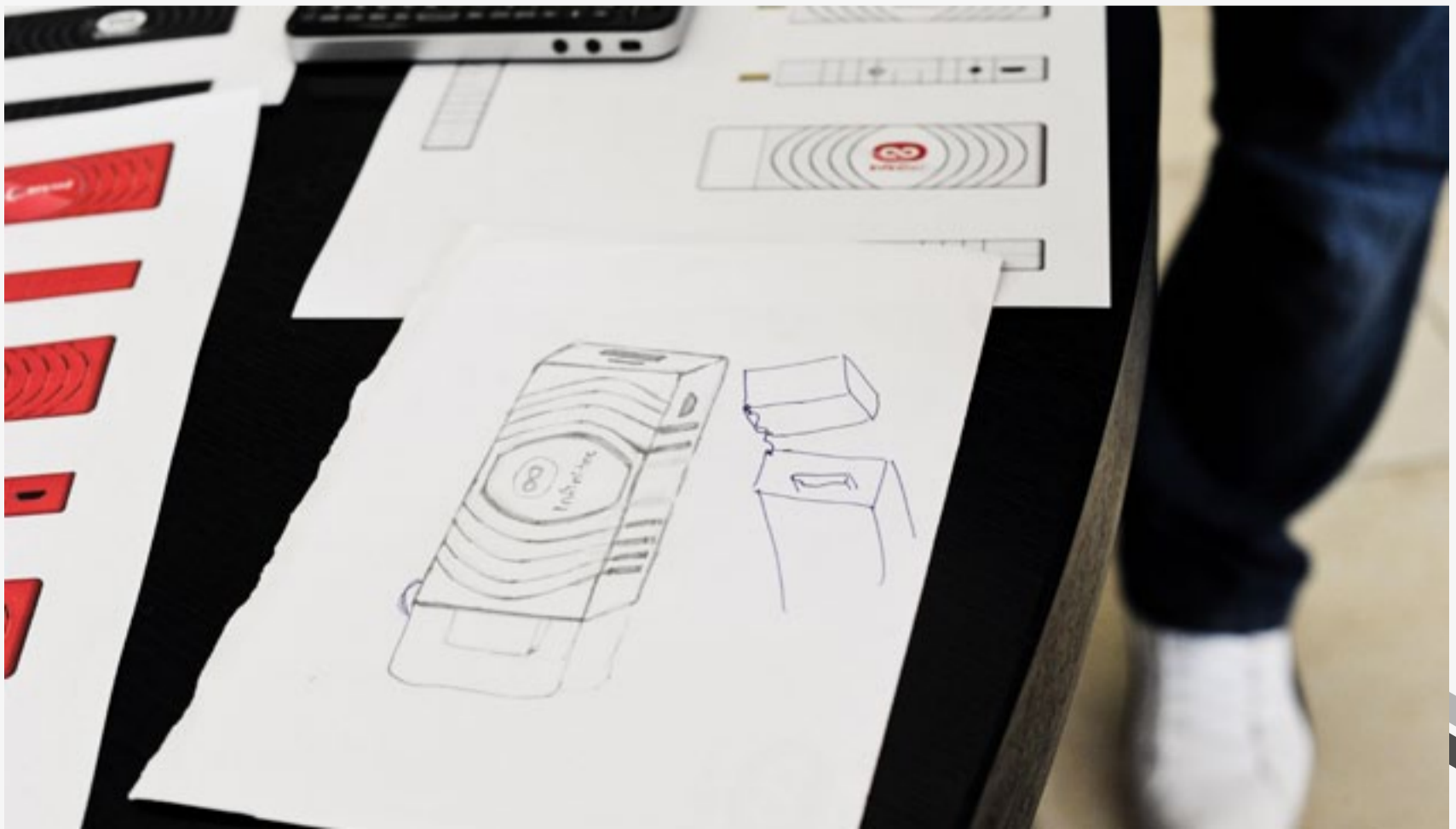
Zahran is a unique character. Born in Saudi Arabia, holder of a Canadian passport and presently planted in the United Arab Emirates, he's trotted the globe a fair amount. He stands boldly, and packs the smile of a true gentleman. He's slender and energetic, and if he's worn from the wear of four-plus years of startup life, he does a fine job of concealing it. When we meet, he's cool and collected, as if he's about to introduce me to his favorite video game. Instead, he's about to show me the product that could make or break his future as an entrepreneur.

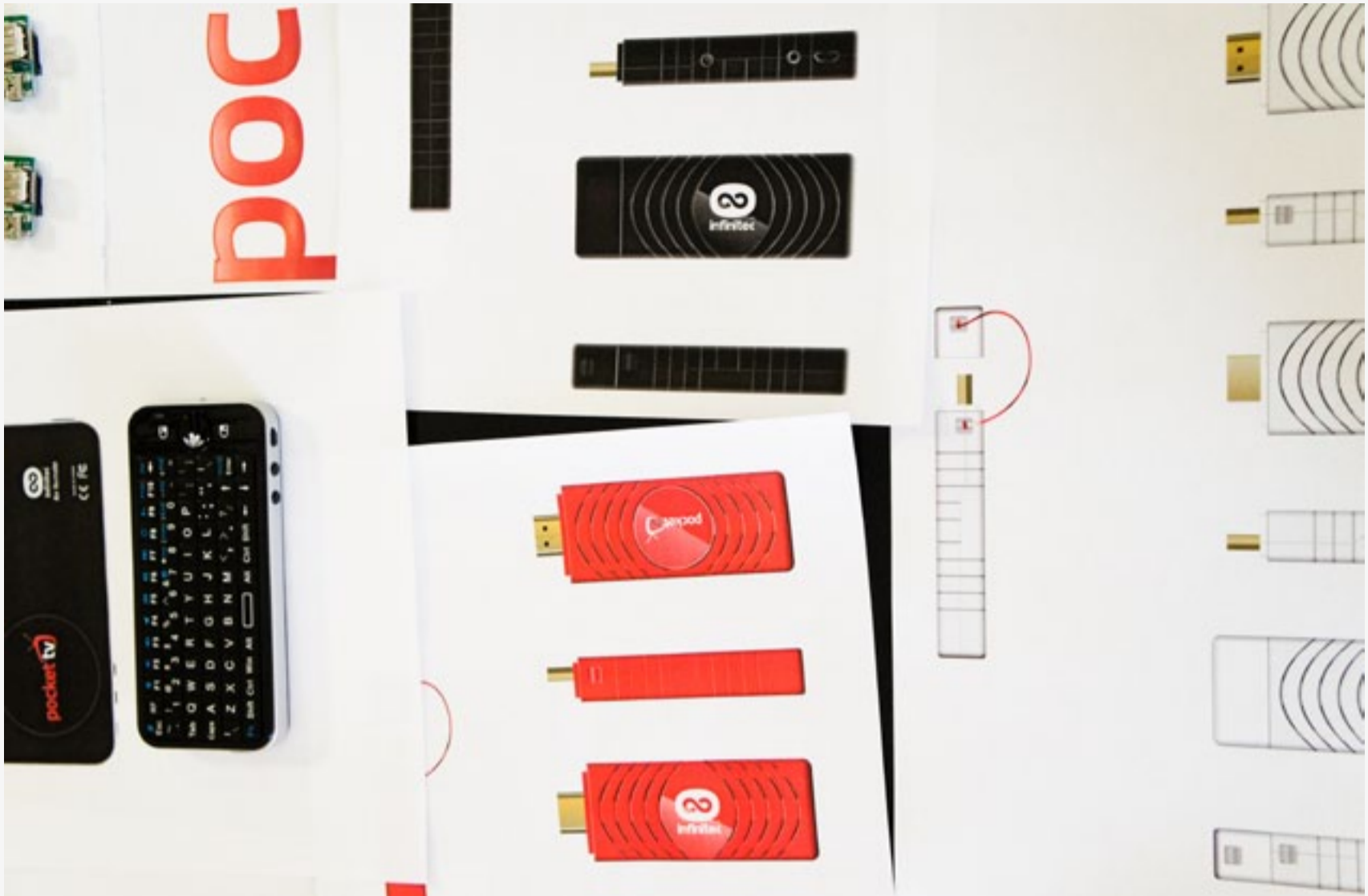
He's a self-proclaimed optimist and realist, struggling to counter dreams with reality. He's also sitting in the living room of his modest Dubai apartment showcasing what he hopes will be a highly enjoyable product, just a year and change after having to close his branded office in a swank section of one of the world's hottest (figuratively and literally) cities.

In just four years, Infnitec has witnessed more ups and downs than most technology startups would have ever seen in the noughties. The reason? It has actually survived its stratospheric rise and fall, and was able to peel itself



Iterations of the Pocket TV in various stages of design. At this point, "pretty" isn't the goal — "functional" is.





from Dubai's desert floor and try the whole thing again — this time with perspective.

“Would you have made another product if not for Kickstarter?” I ask.

“No. No — I probably wouldn't have tried the startup thing again. I would've probably had a fairly typical day job at this point,” replies Zahran.

His voice rings of gentle gratitude, understanding that Infinitec has been thrown a lifeline that didn't exist just a few years back. He's actually fortunate in a few ways. Starting a consumer technology outfit in Dubai is something of a chore. As in, it's unprecedented. There are architectural wonders, enviable fuel supplies and a banking core that rivals any metropolis in the modern world. But what the United Arab Emirates' most notable city doesn't offer is a breeding ground for tech startups. This is no Silicon Valley. This is an unending desert fixated on wealth, and if you aren't in a certain echelon, most everything is an uphill battle.

Details, details. Every square millimeter of the design and packaging is pored over, with these mockups showing the stages of progress.



“We talked to people here, but no one would actually bite,” says Zahran.

There’s money in Dubai — oh, is there money in Dubai — but investing in consumer tech is still a foreign concept in the city of world’s firsts. Zahran initially founded Infinitec from his own pockets along with help from a few close friends and family members. The company did what its founders thought was best — it spent over \$100,000 going through the motions of setting up a legitimate business in Dubai, replete with an office building and rooms to hold meetings with potential clients. But, as it turns out, those weren’t the things it needed to focus on. The IUM shipped with software that was far from final. Zahran confesses that his biggest mistake the first go-round was “trying to do *everything*, instead of prioritizing the bits that would be truly important to the end user.”

Zahran even admits that Engadget’s own review of the IUM — harsh, to say the least — was just one of many that led to Infinitec’s downfall. At the time, we suggested that the IUM couldn’t be recommended unless one was “fond of pain,” while Raju PP at *TechPP* said in his review that “it shows why you must think before buying a debut product.” While just about everyone agreed that the concept was phenomenal, the difficulty of use killed any momentum it had. Instead of building on the launch of its first product, the company quickly exhausted all of its funds. In fact, the company was at a point where the IUM simply *had* to succeed if Infinitec was to last; having no cushion leaves no room for negative reviews. With weak sales making it impossible to proceed, Zahran effectively shut down the company. There was nothing left to pay anyone. These days, there are only 15 to 20 people working with him on the Pocket TV, and the majority of those are from third-party companies working on a freelance basis.

TRADING BATTLES FOR WARS

So, why is he here now? Why are we talking about a second opportunity in his living room? How is this even possible? Turns out, Zahran was happy to clarify:



“In a previous life, I worked for large IT and telecom multinationals like Nokia and Nokia Siemens Networks. Mainly in sales and business development, handling the larger accounts and new customers. Always flying around closing deals, generating revenue and that sort of thing.

One day at Nokia Siemens Networks, I closed the largest deal the company had ever done in the region. A \$1 billion dollar deal that took almost a year of my life to put together. When the deal was finalized and the dust settled, I realized that all I had received for my last year of working 12 to 14 hours a day and no weekends was a pat on the back. I’ve never been motivated by financial gain, but I simply couldn’t understand how an organization could care so little about someone who had worked so hard and made them so much money. I realized then and there that life is too short to wake up every morning feeling unfulfilled.”

It’s a familiar tale, this particular part. I’ve heard similar stories from founders far and wide, and just as the startup life isn’t for everyone, neither is the corporate one. What’s impressive, however, is Zahran’s will. I ask him to explain some of the frustrations faced in starting Infnitec, and continuing it now that Kickstarter has provided a source of funding that was impossible to get during the creation of the IUM.

He admits that had Kickstarter been around during Infnitec’s first funding, he would’ve “absolutely” used it. But even now, getting things to gel hasn’t been easy. After the IUM’s failure, Zahran was facing a reality that would’ve seen him likely back in the corporate world. But as a last-ditch effort to commercialize one of the myriad of products he had dreamed up in a notebook of sketches on his kitchen table, he turned to a crowdfunding solution that was seemingly taking the world by storm.

“We still self-funded to get to the prototype stage,”

“Interns that were here working for almost nothing were literally crying. They had poured their soul into this place, and we had built a culture that was worth hanging around for.”





Zahran says. “But by using Kickstarter we were able to get upfront sales which we used to fund our development and manufacturing efforts. Therefore, we were able to make the product we wanted to make rather than the one our budget allowed us to make.”

But then, the nightmares began. Again. Zahran speaks softly to me about the day he had to close down the Infinitec office, flashing back to a few months prior.

“Interns that were here working for almost nothing were literally crying. They had poured their soul into this place, and we had built a culture that was worth hanging around for.”

All told, six full-timers and a couple of interns were let go, but Zahran worked with each of them to find jobs elsewhere; in fact, a few have returned on a freelance basis to help with various aspects of the Pocket TV. While working on the IUM, there were over 40 other part-timers contributing remotely.

In the midst of dealing with the feeling of bottoming out after the IUM failed, he was also tasked with putting this all

Ahmad Zahran demonstrates a near-final Pocket TV build in his Dubai apartment. For now, it's the only office the company has.



in perspective. To learn from the fallout. To somehow learn something from having to release every employee at the company, while his co-founder, David McKern, dropped the dream to rejoin the corporate world. McKern seems to be at peace with his decision, but he's still helping Zahran from the sidelines. While no longer employed by Infnitec, Zahran relies on his prior co-founder as a sounding board for ideas. McKern looks back fondly on his time with Infnitec, but he's been around the block long enough to know that not all startups succeed. Due to personal matters, he's also considering relocation to Australia, which would put him too far away from the nucleus to have any significant impact on the (assumed) future of the company.

SURMOUNTABLE FRUSTRATIONS

Despite the challenges, there was no way Zahran was giving up the dream if there was even a single option left. He was faced with regrets — the “what ifs” that every failed startup hangs on for months, if not years. He too was out of cash, giving him a very simple answer to my inquiry on why he decided to launch yet again in Dubai: “This is where we are.”

Indeed, Kickstarter's website loads just fine in the UAE, but powering a Dubai-based startup through the site isn't as easy as you might expect. Zahran seems entirely more cheerful than I'd be when discussing the hurdles that he has faced — and continues to face. Despite being a Canadian passport holder who's residing in the UAE, Zahran was forced to find a business partner (who has requested to remain anonymous) with a presence in the United States just to get his project off of the ground. Then, Kickstarter rejected the initial proposal.

“I don't know how much vetting they do over there, but I've seen rebadged products get approved and net hundreds of thousands of dollars in funding,” Zahran says. “Ours ... who knows? We resubmitted with a video and somehow that one went through.”

It's not a comfortable place to be — living on fumes, relying on a web-

“These moments of brilliance are what founders live for.”



site as your last resort. The power Kickstarter wields is tremendous and much like developers tussling with Apple for approval of an app into the App Store, there are very real battles being fought by startups to get their dreams through the channels of Kickstarter. From there, the moment of elation becomes immediately overshadowed by the thought of what must come next.

“Every day, I view my job as a problem-solver,” Zahran says. “I crack open my inbox and see hundreds of items, and I have to methodically organize and prioritize these issues if I ever hope to achieve anything.

These moments of brilliance are what founders live for. That moment that you’re approved on Kickstarter. That moment that you hit your funding goal. That moment that you ship your first product. But these moments fade almost immediately as you realize the responsibilities that follow.”

I can imagine. Nodding in understanding, the weight of it all starts to sink in. This man is trying to finalize designs, think of potential complaints before they’re voiced, establish sales channels, maintain a website, finish coding, integrate his latest hardware tweaks, build a time table for updating his product to Android 4.1, make the rent, nab a Nexus 7 for testing an Android control application and make the final calls on packaging. Oh, and maintain an amicable relationship with his girlfriend.

“It’s fine!” she says with a chuckle, replying to me as I ask if she ever tires of Zahran’s obsession with gadget testing. She strikes me as someone who understands the rigors of a startup, and respects the long hours that come with it.

“Is this really easier than working 14 hours a day for a megacorp?” I wonder. But honestly, it’s not about ease. In fact, it’s about everything *but* ease.

Once the Pocket TV surpassed its \$500,000 funding goal, the troubles didn’t end.

“I think that’s the point where we started freaking out a little,” Zahran says. “Suddenly, there’s a lot of pressure to deliver and make this product as good or even better than what most people expect. We’re haunted by the mistakes we had with the IUM and we don’t want people to





think that that's all we are capable of. That was a one-off mistake because we over-reached, not understanding the limitations of being in a place like Dubai.”

He notes that Kickstarter was fairly easy to deal with once he was able to line up a US-based business partner so that things went smoothly with Amazon Payments. But, he says, he began to receive massive amounts of feedback from consumers that wanted to get in on the action even after the Kickstarter round had ended. So, he did what any product company would do: he opened up pre-orders on Infinitec's website using PayPal — the world-recognized digital money exchanger. Currently, there's over \$30,000 in his account, which is entirely frozen from both receiving and depositing. He's been waiting for over a week for a response from PayPal on exactly why this is happening, and he's not alone. PayPal has long since had a reputation for inexplicably freezing accounts without cause — just visit PayPalSucks.com for a surprisingly accurate tale of the tape — and Zahran confesses that this looks worse than usual due to the business operating out of the UAE. Andy McMillan, organizer of the Build conference, recently had his high-profile case seen by the president of PayPal

Engadget's Darren Murph takes the Pocket TV for a spin, pushing every button possible to find any cracks in the foundation.



... but only after the company had frozen \$60,000 of his funds for months. And he's lucky; people with paltry followings on Twitter don't receive such attention.

"It's just what we need right now," Zahran says with a forced smile. "[It's] as if we don't have enough things to execute on without a payment processing company causing us grief. Being in the Middle East is very difficult; if you're in the US, you can just set up a bank account and use WePay. We don't have that, and so PayPal is almost the only one that caters to our region. So, we're kind of stuck."

He's even expressed to PayPal that he would be entirely okay letting the company hold incoming funds until Infinitec ships actual products, thereby releasing PayPal from any risk it would face from a mass refund request. Still, radio silence. Welcome to yet another day in the life of a startup, where even problems you can't possibly conceive will find a way to test your spirit's durability.

You don't have to look far to find doubters. I've personally received a smattering of emails from those who chipped in on the Pocket TV through Kickstarter, and none of them are pleasant. Plenty of backers are skeptical of Zahran's PayPal story. Plenty more are wondering why those \$55 Android dongles scattered across dodgy e-tailer sites aren't a better value. And from the outsiders I've spoken to who will soon have a Pocket TV on the way, they're still wondering what kind of differentiating factor Infinitec will truly deliver.

In a way, the ordeal reminds me of Fusion Garage. Plenty of flash, a failed first product and a hugely hyped second chance. Needless to say, the Grid 10 fared no better than the JooJoo, and the company perished nearly as quickly as it resurfaced. Infinitec faces a similar road; if it pushes a product out too quickly, it risks the same negative reaction that the IUM had. If it waits for perfection, it may see every lingering fan finally turn their back on

"[Infinitec] had blown people away with the original idea, but it wasn't able to follow through."



the company.

Sean Hollister, presently a senior editor at *The Verge*, reviewed the original IUM for Engadget in 2010. Speaking candidly about his experience with the company the first go-round, he said:

“[Infinitec] had blown people away with the original idea, but it wasn’t able to follow through. [Its founders] were already committed to retailers — they’d built this lovely little box to sell it in — but the quality of the product wasn’t what they’d hoped, and the software they wrote to facilitate the pairing and dual-WiFi procedure felt like an afterthought. I think they were probably genuinely blindsided by quality control issues, and that they never considered problems like ‘How do people who don’t know about WiFi set this up?’ and ‘How do you maintain your connection to the internet when you’re using WiFi to connect to the dongle?’ until it was far too late.”

When asked about his take on Pocket TV, and if he’d be willing to give the company a second chance, he replied: “Now that they’ve got a solid failure under their belt, are tackling a less difficult project, and are on Kickstarter where they can set their own ship dates, I think Infinitec has a decent chance to succeed. Still, I don’t think I’d put down Kickstarter money. The company shipped the IUM when it wasn’t ready, and *still* appears to be selling it on its website. I don’t know if I’d trust the company with no-strings-attached cash when Kickstarter offers so little oversight.”

ONWARD AND UPWARD

Infinitec is enjoying the spoils of living in a highly intriguing era. It’s one of the first consumer technology startups that was allowed to fail using more conventional means of funding, and then reboot itself using an entirely different one: money from the pockets of people like you. It’s also doing this for more than the money. Zahran’s goal isn’t to “exit” or “sell” to the first company that takes notice; it’s actually attempting to generate enough money to keep Infinitec going to the next thing. And the next thing. And maybe, if fate allows, even the next thing. He wants to create a company that’s enjoyable to work for — like



many idealists, he views life as worth living when one can go into work each day to a job that brings fulfillment, even if it's fraught with challenges. He also wants to change Dubai and the UAE. He sees opportunity for consumer technology to thrive here.

In fact, the Dubai-based SeedStartup just found its roots in the area earlier this year. Right now, the entity focuses on accelerating growth for digital media startups in the UAE, giving some credence to Zahran's hopes for the region.

In spending the better part of a week immersed in Zahran's world, it's obvious that technology has a place here. It's the innovative spirit that needs to be conjured up in this space, and Zahran's hopeful that Infintec's story will be a catalyst. He's quick to point out that this isn't his tale — it's always the brand, never the individual. Of course, this *feels* like his baby, but he doesn't want the focus to be on him.

While in the city, I ride on the Dubai Metro as the city celebrates the rail network's third year of existence. It has carried locals and tourists alike for three solid years and there hasn't been a human driver for any of those. I'm showering using sea water that's been stripped of salt from a marvel of engineering just down the road. I'm looking out at a spire that rockets into the sky — the Burj Khalifa not only showcases what technology is capable of when applied to architecture, but it's proof that Dubai is

The Air Controller is just one of many control mechanisms being evaluated by Zahran.




built on a premise of the impossible being nothing. In a sense, Dubai itself is a startup whose future isn't entirely clear. The dreams that have been built were done with monies from an expiring resource, and pundits have plenty of right to question how Dubai will proceed once oil fades and it's left to depend on more uncertain resources.

Shortly after our meeting, Zahran met with officials at du — a telecom and pay-TV provider here in the UAE. The goal is to sell the Pocket TV to du, who will then offer it as an optional extra to its subscribers. Additionally, he recently fielded a call from a prominent retail company in North America, with a buyer interested in getting the Pocket TV onto its shelves.

"It's almost certainly due to the global exposure provided by Kickstarter," says Zahran. "We're the same people as before, but when you hit that number (the \$500,000 funding goal), suddenly parties from everywhere take you seriously."

I nod in understanding of what he's alluding to — the world is a harsh place to survive in. Some of the best ideas are kept hidden from the mainstream simply because some arbitrary milestone hasn't been met. Or, the people who have them don't know "the right people."

Infinitec is perhaps one of the most fortunate of them all, boasting a laundry list of challenges that many failed startups would give everything to have. One can hope that fewer and fewer brilliant ideas will die on the vine thanks to (relatively) frictionless funding options like Indiegogo and Kickstarter. And maybe — just maybe — we'll see the sparks of Silicon Valley flying all over the globe. 

"We're the same people as before, but when you hit that number (the \$500,000 funding goal), suddenly parties from everywhere take you seriously."

Darren holds the Guinness World Record for being the most prolific professional blogger on planet Earth. He's also an astronaut.



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EXTREME DEEP FIELD



NASA; ESA; G. ILLINGWORTH, D. MAGEE, AND P. OESCH, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA CRUZ; R. BOUWENS, LEIDEN UNIVERSITY; AND THE HUDF09 TEAM



NICK STAMM



NVIDIA'S DIRECTOR OF TECHNICAL MARKETING tells us why he covets no man's (or manufacturers) gadgets.

What gadget do you depend on most?
My smartphone. I have access to numerous smartphones and tablets, both ours and the competition's. The two I currently use most are the Tegra 3-based HTC One X phone — great display, fast, awesome 3D gaming, very good camera — and the Google Nexus 7 tablet — handy form factor, stylish design, solid construction, delivers a great user experience with Tegra 3 and Jelly Bean.

Which do you look back upon most fondly?

In the past decade, the first that comes to mind is my old Blackberry 6210. A real battle-axe of a device that was banged around numerous times but always worked reliably. Earlier would have to be my first cell phone — the Fujitsu "Pocket Commander," which was the smallest form-factor phone at the time, circa 1991 to 92.

Which company does the most to push the industry?

Every major technology company believes it is driving the industry, and we're no exception. We're proud to



“I thought Microsoft’s ‘Kin’ phone naming was pretty weird. OK, very weird.”

have been the first to bring dual- and quad-core chips to mobile devices, and to bring console-quality gaming to mobile devices.

What is your operating system of choice?

It depends on what I’m doing, although I must admit – after seven years with NVIDIA and nearly 14 years with PC Magazine before NVIDIA -- I never became a real Mac user (though I used an Apple II extensively years ago!). Today, I use my Windows 7-based Lenovo Thinkpad (NVIDIA Optimus version) for day-to-day business work, my Android phones and my Android tablets. I do have iPads, and while they’re fine pieces of machinery, I find the experience too limiting. Gaming isn’t nearly as good as with my Tegra-based devices.

What are your favorite gadget names?

Always liked the names Droid and Optimus. Though a new low-end (non-Tegra-based) smartphone recently surfaced with a macho name – the Pantech “Marauder.” Wow. A phone that is a marauder, aka an outlaw, a pillager, plunderer, bandit,

looter, thug, thief, raider ... cool.

What are your least favorite?

Even though it was based on our original Tegra chip, I thought Microsoft’s “Kin” phone naming was pretty weird. OK, very weird. The “Sprint Samsung Galaxy S II Epic 4G Touch” and “Samsung Galaxy S II Skyrocket HD” roll right off the tongue.

What is your earliest gadget memory?

Can I go back 47 years? Then definitely my General Electric P1700 10-transistor AM hand-held radio. I remember listening to the first US broadcasts of “I Can’t Get No Satisfaction” using that radio. And it still works today!

What technological advancement do you most admire?

Aside from the two obvious answers, I would have to say the advancements in microprocessor design and fabrication, and commercial aircraft technology. What are the obvious answers? Why medical technologies and indoor plumbing, of course. The latter separating us from apes, simplifying our lives, managing our waste and saving our asses from freezing outdoors!

Which do you most despise?

Hmm, OK, how about Instant Messaging for business use. Unless



you're in a mission-critical project where you must be fully connected in real time, I find IM usage on PCs or other devices highly annoying with the numerous low-priority interrupts. And people get frustrated if you step away for a minute or don't respond immediately. No, thanks. Been there, done that in a prior company. It sucks.

What fault are you most tolerant of in a gadget?

Poor built-in speaker quality. I don't expect great sound from the tiny built-in speakers, and am pleasantly surprised if they actually sound OK. But I do expect high-quality audio output through the headphone jack or transmitted via Bluetooth to the Jambox.

Which are you most intolerant of?

Lack of intuitive interfaces and controls. Music skips. Random slowdowns and lockups. At my son's recent high school graduation ceremony I was using a smartphone to take some photos and videos from the stands. Right before all the students were about to throw their graduation caps in the air, the phone locked up and I missed the video shot! Grrrrr! I wanted to launch the thing from the stands.

What device do you covet most?

I don't actually covet any device.

I like the HTC One X, but I'm not thrilled with its protruding camera lens that is easy to scratch. I think the Nexus 7 tablet is fabulous, but wish it had 4G LTE.

If you could change one thing about your phone what would it be?

Again, recess the camera lens! I now use a protective Ballistic case, but it made the phone noticeably larger and less comfortable in the hands and pocket.


What does being connected mean to you?

Being able to send and receive all sorts of information from just about any location. Being able to work from my home office, but appear as if I'm in the cubicle down the hall. Staying in touch with my family when traveling and keeping up with friends and in social media, etc.

When are you least likely to reply to an email?

When sleeping and when I'm actively playing racquetball two to three nights / week. I leave the smartphone in my gym bag outside the courts, and I'm totally focused on the game, nothing else.

When did you last disconnect?

Aside from racquetball and sleeping, would be back in June on a day-long jungle excursion outside of Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. 



The week that was in 140 characters or less.

T-Mo Metrosexuals, Checking in with Curiosity and Self-DUI

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ESC

REHASHED

@noahkravitz

Does the T-Mobile Metro PCS merger mean that Carly is a metrosexual?

@agahran

T-Mobile might merge w/ MetroPCS? Wow, talk about a network technology nightmare.... #facepalm

@Tim_Stevens

People called me crazy last year when I said we'd have 1080p smartphone displays in 2012. Now...

@TrevorDickerson

NASA's Curiosity Rover checked into a crater on Foursquare... on Mars. My head might explode from the nerdy awesomeness

@7im

can you drink beer in a self-driving car?

THE STRIP

BY SHANNON WHEELER



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TIME MACHINES



PHOTO BY NATHAN LAZARNICK/GEORGE EASTMAN HOUSE/GETTY IMAGES



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