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At Last, the iPhone.

A first look at the most eagerly anticipated gizmo ever.

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WEB EXCLUSIVE

by **Steven Levy**

Newsweek

Updated: 4:49 p.m. PT June 26, 2007

June 26, 2007 - A couple of weeks ago I went to Pittsburgh for what I thought would be a day trip. Since I was headed back that evening, I didn't take my laptop, but because of thunderstorms across the Eastern Seaboard, my sojourn turned into an overnight stay. So I had an opportunity to give a good workout to something I had received the previous day: a review unit of Apple's eagerly awaited (boy, that's an understatement) iPhone.

Story continues below ↓

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During my travels and airport delays, I was able



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to keep up with my e-mail, negotiate my way around tips on the city from an old friend whose numl have handy, check the weather conditions in New York and D.C., monitor baseball scores and blogs, listen to an early Neil Young concert and amuse myself with silly YouTube videos and an episode of "Weeds," all on a single charge before the battery ran down. Now, just about all those things could have been done by devices that are already out on the market. But considering I'd had the iPhone for just a day, and never taken a glance at a manual, it was an impressive introduction. In contrast, I've had a Motorola handset for two years and am still baffled at its weird approach to Web browsing and messaging. What's more, with the exception of learning to type on the iPhone, which requires some concentration, doing all those things on that five-ounce device was fun, in the same way that switching from an old command-line interface to the Macintosh graphical user interface in the mid-1980s was a kick. And when I showed the iPhone to people during that trip and in the days afterward—especially people under 25—the most common reaction was, "I have to have this," sometimes followed by a quick, if alarmingly reckless, consideration of what might need to be pawned in order to make the purchase.

And there it is: one of the most hyped consumer products ever comes pretty close to justifying the bombast. Apple has a history of using cutting-edge technology, slick design and friendly software to break the common logjam in which our machines have the capability to perform certain tasks, but developers haven't figured out how to make the experience easy, even pleasurable, for users. That's one reason why people, especially the tens of millions who love iPods, have been so eagerly awaiting the iPhone. "Everyone we talk to hates their phones—it's universal," Steve Jobs told me on a call to my iPhone a couple of days ago. (The control-freaky Apple CEO was just checking up to see how I was doing.) If you're looking for quibbles, flaws and omissions, you'll certainly find them in this first version of the iPhone. (I'll get to these below.) But the bottom line is that the iPhone is a significant leap. It's a superbly engineered, cleverly designed and imaginatively implemented approach to a problem that no one has cracked to date: merging a phone handset, an Internet navigator and a media player in a package where every component shines, and the features are welcoming rather than forboding. The iPhone is the rare convergence device where things actually converge.

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Well before you turn on the iPhone it's clear that this is a phone apart. The first difference takes place at the store (you can buy these only at Apple stores or retail outlets of network carrier AT&T, for the wallet-busting sum of \$500 or \$600, depending on whether you get 4 or 8 gigabytes worth of flash memory). Instead of going through the usual complicated contract signing and credit-vetting ceremony with a fast-talking and slow-processing salesperson, Apple has come up with a startling idea: you simply buy the thing and go home. Then you open up the snugly fit black box—the design blitz at Apple begins with the packaging— and take out the handset. It's a classic example of the Apple look: slim, shiny and elegant. As it did with MP3 players, Apple has made even its most stylish competitors look like Soviet-issue contraptions. The iPhone has but a single button on the front—its sole function is to return you to the menu. The only other controls are a small sleep-wake switch on the top and a volume meter and ring/vibration switch on the side; they protrude so slightly that you can hardly see them.

Setup is a snap. As with the iPod, the device is a satellite of Apple's free iTunes software. Plug the iPhone into a computer with your iTunes library (Mac or Windows) and the automatic sync function not only carries over your songs, videos and movies on iTunes library, but also photos, your contacts and calendar items. It also copies your e-mail address book and information onto your phone. This is one of the few phones that easily imports your information from your PC; because this is usually such a painful process, the vast majority of people with mobile phones never get around to moving over all their contact and calendar items. Signing up for phone service is easily handled in a straightforward process through the iTunes store. The only scary part comes when you have to provide a Social Security number to establish your credit, but Apple assures me that the data isn't retained. Prices are those of the standard AT&T plans, \$60, \$80 or \$100 a month, depending on how many minutes. All the plans include unlimited data for e-mail and Internet. When I went through it I was unable to move my current mobile phone number to the device, but Apple tells me that this will be implemented by the time the phone launches on Friday.

Hit the wake button on top, use your finger to swipe an unlock (the iPhone is otherwise dormant so it won't accidentally turn on in your pocket and wind up calling the boss or playing a Jay-Z song). When the menu screen appears, you get a first indication of how Apple has cleverly managed to compress tasks best done on a large screen or a full-featured laptop into that tiny piece of silicon real estate. Apple does this in part by implementing a tactile vocabulary full of swipes, pinches, stretches and taps on its vaunted "multi-touch" screen. One of the greatest strengths of the iPhone is its stunning 3.5-inch display, which takes up almost the entire surface of the front, ringed by a halo of chrome. Using sensors, the iPhone can automatically switch from vertical "portrait" orientation to horizontal "landscape" mode, allowing better access to Web pages and the proper orientation to movies. Those tools are utilized in four keynote applications and (so far) 11 other programs included in this launch version. Here's a partial rundown:

Phone. Did I mention that you can make phone calls with this thing?

The iPhone has an excellent implement of state-of-the-art features like integrating contacts with the phone function. Plus, the phone allows you to merge up to five conversations into a conference, and a great feature called Visual Voicemail lets you view on screen all the voice messages left for you to play back in the order you choose. Apple also includes a special version of their white earbuds with a tiny microphone on one wire. Those buds don't fit my ears well, but there will be plenty of third-party alternatives. I tried the Bluetooth-enabled Jawbone headset, as well as a Shure headphone adapter with a microphone along with its noise-blocking earbuds.



Courtesy Apple

All in One: The iPhone is works as a topnotch phone, Web browser, mp3 player and more

Another nice touch: when the phone is at your cheek, the screen goes dormant. But when you lower the phone to tap in some numbers in a voice mail system, the screen reappears to take in your input. You can also play with other applications while you talk. (One weird effect: if you've been using the iPhone a lot it feels warm on your cheek. Not laptop-catch-on-fire hot. But still.) A quibble: Apple offers a range of nice if not show-stopping ring tones, but wouldn't it have been awesome if the iPhone let you choose snippets of songs in your iTunes library as ringtones?

E-mail. The best thing about the way this handles e-mail is that the message content shows up vividly. It nicely manages JPEGs, HTML and PDFs. (The iPhone can also open Word and Excel attachments, though you can't edit them.) In short, e-mail looks more like you're working on a computer than a clunky phone. I had some problems with one of my accounts—sometimes the mail was blocked, other times it wouldn't send outgoing mail. Apple looked into it and told me that it has something to do with my ISP blocking Port 25. Their engineers suggested a fix and said that this was something that would probably be addressed in an update. Still, this is an explanation someone paying \$500 for an e-mail device shouldn't have to hear. It remains to be seen whether corporate information technology specialists will embrace the iPhone for their users. Because the iPhone has to prove itself as easy to use as RIM's breakout hit (see my notes on keyboarding below), it's going to be an uphill climb for Apple to pry the devices away from the Crackberry-heads, even if Blackberry mail is ugly by comparison.

iPod. Jobs calls the iPhone the "best iPod we ever made." It's certainly the one that most beautifully displays videos and movies, and

it's fun to turn the iPod sideways and see "cover flow," the array of album covers already familiar to iTunes users. Also, the new way of navigating—swiping down your song list or fast-browsing by skimming your finger on a vertically arranged alphabet on the right of the screen—is a superior interface. But the best iPod? Workout lovers will want to keep their Nanos and Shuffles for the gym. And heavy music users accustomed to 30 or 80 gigabytes of storage will be unhappy at the limited capacity of the iPhone. (Of the 8 gigs on my iPhone, I now have 669 songs, one three-hour movie, three half-hour television episodes, 361 photos, and a bit of "other," meaning e-mail and contacts. It's almost full.) Possibly, those considering an iPhone might be daunted at the idea of having to carry it around in addition to their current iPod. Also, I was disappointed that Apple didn't implement a way to buy songs or videos directly from the iPhone—you have to synch them from iTunes on a PC first. What's the use of having Wi-Fi on an iPod if you can't go to the iTunes store?

Safari. Web-browsing is where the iPhone leaves competitors in the dust. It does the best job yet of compressing the World Wide Web on a palm-size device. The screen can nicely display an entire Web page, and by dragging, tapping, pinching and stretching your fingers you can zero in on the part of the page you want to read. Web pages you wouldn't dare go to on other phones are suddenly accessible, though those that require Flash, Windows Media or Real Media formats won't work. A clear, very readable implementation of bookmarks helps you get to your favorites without typing.

Other Applications. It's very simple to send SMS text messages with Apple's custom application—identify the contact and type the message as you do with Apple's iChat app. It can also get very expensive—simply typing "yo" qualifies as one of the 200 SMS messages that come with your plan. (You can pay for extra texting.) It's disappointing that Apple didn't include an instant messaging application for the iPhone that easily lets you use AIM or other services. There are Web workarounds (I used a beta version of Heysan, a mobile instant messaging service) but they are nowhere near as what Apple would have done if it had used its skills to simply port iChat to the iPhone.

On the other hand, Google Maps works wonderfully, taking full advantage of the touch screen, and integrating nicely with the phone function and even your contact list (you can instantly see where your friends live). It will expertly route a trip for you and even clue you in on the traffic density.

The specially formatted YouTube videos work great on Wi-Fi, but can display in a lower quality when you're not at a hotspot and are using AT&T's EDGE network. At launch, only a small percentage of the millions of video will have been reformatted to work with the phone. (Fortunately for me, this included a couple of swell Amy Winehouse videos.) The fact is that YouTube without the long tail of hundreds of thousands of videos is barely worth the effort. But Google and Apple promise that by fall the entire collection will be available for iPhone streaming, and that users will be able to fill up every idle moment with unproductive glory.

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