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LG KE850 Prada Review

The best stylish design

LG KE850, also known as the LG Prada, phone resulted from the work of 2 renowned companies: LG Electronics and the Italian fashion brand Prada. Actually, you can see the phone as a piece of LG software "dressed" in Prada designed clothes. Moreover, LG Prada is considered by many as being the first mobile phone that uses complete touchscreen display. The resemblance with Apple's iPhone is striking and LG Electronics claims that the latter's design has been copied from the LG Prada handset. True or not, the fact is that while LG's Prada is just a simple fashionistas mobile phone, the iPhone features a MAC OS X which makes it a true smartphone.

Unveiled in September 2006 when it has also received the iF Design Award prize, LG's Prada has been made available on the market in late February 2007. The price starts from USD 700, but may vary greatly depending on the location, plan and network operator.

Design

Besides the iF Design Award prize won in 2006, LG's Prada also won 'Best of the Best' red dot Design Award in 2007. I believe this says everything about the phone's design which is as stylish as can be. While two thirds of the sold phones are clamshells, the candybar form seems to be a little bit unpopular, but LG Prada comes to contradict these statistics. The phone is slim and the no-button interface with the entire phone face covered by a touch-sensitive screen may look very much like Apple's iPhone, but people must understand that besides the design you can't really compare the two devices.

The 12mm-thick handset measures 98.8mm x 54mm and weighs only 85 grams (battery included). This is a light candybar with a very big display (240 x 400 pixels) and no visible keyboard. It is made from a plastic (cheap or not, it's still plastic) material, which is very easy to scratch whether or not you're using the leather case that comes with the phone. In fact there's a big chance that you'll be scratching your display if you use the leather case and the only efficient way to protect it seems to be the "invisibleSHIELD" sold by a company called Zagg Inc. (it is delivered worldwide). Right under the big screen, there are three keys that you can use to Accept/End calls and a dedicated "Back" key. The volume dual-key and the speaker/profiles key are placed on the left side of the phone. Besides changing the Profiles of the phone you can use the speaker key to bring up the virtual keyboard on the screen during a call.

There's also a slot covered by a plastic stripe where you can plug in the wired headset or the charger. On the right side of the handset, you can find the Lock/Unlock key and the MP3 player/Camera key. The latter will open up the music player if you push it once or the camera if you push and hold it for a few seconds. On the back of the phone, LG included another 2 Megapixel camera that features Schneider-Kreuznach lenses with flash and self-mirror capabilities. The external speaker was strangely placed on the bottom of the phone.

LG Prada comes in an exquisite box which contains a leather case, wired headset with remote control and a 256 MB microSD memory card.

Display and Camera

LG KE850 comes with an unusually big TFT touchscreen (240 x 400 pixels resolution) that supports up to 256k colors. The screen won't respond to any commands if you use a stylus or other objects and you will only be able to handle it with your fingers. This is the first handset that relies entirely on the use of the touchscreen for accessing the phone's functions. LG warned users that the phone will not work in hot or humid conditions, but neither in case you're wearing gloves. Thanks to the capacitive technology, the display responds very quickly being also quite accurate; however, it might be a pain to handle for people with wide fingers. The most annoying thing by far is the scrolling, which is very hard to execute, unless you're using the dual volume key. Outdoor use of the phone can mean trouble for you especially if you're looking to initiate calls, because it's almost impossible to see anything on the screen in sunlight. There's still a chance that you can use the phone on sunny days, but you have to protect the display from direct sunlight. Word of advice – protect your screen with your life as it scratches very easily even if you're using it with gloves (which you cannot, as I've already told you).

The 2 Megapixel camera features Schneider-Kreuznach, flash and self-mirror capabilities. The quality of the pictures depends very much on the light conditions. The maximum resolution available for taking pictures is 1600 x 1200 pixels, but you won't be able to use the zoom capabilities of the camera with this resolution, so you must lower it to at least 640 x 480 pixels (you can zoom with the dual volume key).

As you can see from the pictures below, it's comparable with LG Shine's camera. Indoor pictures are looking much better than those made outside.

The flash is too weak to count, so don't try to take shots at night, unless you're really close on the subject. The usual functions and settings are available for the camera in photo modes as well as in camcorder mode. You can shoot 30 fps video clips in 400 x 200 pixels resolutions and save them in the usual 3GP format.

Menu and Software

LG Prada features a more "primitive" menu than any other LG mobile phone. The interface is simple, intuitive and very easy to use, even for people that are not acquainted with LG mobiles. The four shortcuts on the main screen are not configurable (that is, you cannot change them) and will only give you access to Main Menu, Dialing Pad, Messages and Contacts. The clock on the main display can be easily moved with your fingers anywhere on the screen and can also be used to quickly set an alarm. There are 4 great themes that you can use to personalize the phone, including a black and white Prada theme. All themes are keeping the floating clock on the main display, which by the way can be seen as digital, analog or in both modes. You will have no problems "fingering" through the various menus

of the phone, but you will have a hard time texting or scrolling.

Unfortunately, the phone's software has lots of bugs, exactly like those found in many other LG mobile phones (LG KU580 makes an exception). People will find that they won't be able to attach icons to all contacts or play some MP3 files. All these problems seem to appear randomly, but frequently.

Although the phone features Java MIDP 2.0 emulator there's a big chance that you won't be able to run some Java compatible applications on the phone – reason unknown. Also, you can set MP3 files as ring tones if you open the music player and run those files or if you go to Profiles and personalize the caller ring.

Fortunately, there are some good applications pre-installed on the phone that you can use. There's a Unit Converter, Calculator (basic and scientific), Alarm (only one alarm to set!), World Time Clock, Calendar and Memo. With the help of a Document viewer, you will be able to read any .ppt, .doc, .xls, .pdf or .txt format file. The big screen will offer you a better view, especially when using the Landscape mode, but again…scrolling will be a pain.

The File Manager of the phone is called My Stuff and here's the place where you can store any image, music file or document. The basic Internet browser included won't offer you too many choices, but at least you'll be able to open full HTML web pages. As it came up right before the latest KU580 Chocolate, Prada's firmware needs some adjustments to improve functionality. Even if it's a fashionistas phone, people will want to be able to play MP3 files no matter where they are, copying them or maybe install some other Java compatible third-party applications.

Communication

I'm surprised that this phone features EDGE technology, but I'm equally surprised by the lack of 3G. The GPRS Class 10 (32 - 48 kbps) is enough for users of this type of handset, but it would've been great to be able to make videocalls on such a big touchscreen. Anyway, LG doesn't escape its mediocrity regarding the connectivity tools and offers only 89 Kbps download and 51 Kbps upload data transfer speeds when activating EDGE technology. I've been able to transfer files through Bluetooth 2.0 with speeds up to 37 KB. LG said that the phone definitely supports A2DP, but there seem to be problems and not all Bluetooth headsets are fully compatible with LG's Prada. Some users even experience problems during music playback, like disconnection between the two devices when you want to stop music play for a short period of time. If you want to synchronize the phone with your PC through the USB 2.0 port you must first choose which mode to use: Data transfer or Mass Storage. Furthermore, you need to install the LG Mobile Sync software that comes with the phone to be able to actually get synchronized.

Be very careful when synching your Contacts as the phone doesn't make any difference between the SIM contacts or Phone Memory contacts, mixing them both in one long list, so you'll probably discover that you have the same contact twice. Again, it takes too much time to actually connect the phone with the PC and you won't be able to use any Outlook with your contacts. The phone features all messaging capabilities (POP3, SMTP and IMAP4),

but lacks any SSL security compatibility.

The tri-band (GSM 900 / GSM 1800 / GSM 1900) network compatible candybar has a mediocre GSM signal reception. Sound is clear but much lower than any other LG mobile phone. It's almost impossible to have a conversation in crowded areas even with the help of a handsfree headset.

Processor and Memory

LG KE850 Prada features an ARM9 family processor running at up to 117 MHz speeds, the same as the one embedded in Chocolate Platinum. Even if it's a low class CPU, it is more than enough to handle most of the operations needed. Nevertheless, you'll experience lags and frames losses when running movies and the gaming experience will be less smooth than expected. As I have stated above, the phone features Java MIDP 2.0 compiler but it seems to have some troubles in running some third-party applications.

I cannot understand why LG chose to include only 8MB internal memory on this phone, but also offer a 256 MB microSD memory card in the sales package. Why not 256 MB internal memory and no microSD memory card in the package or a bigger one? While this phone cannot compete with Sony Ercisson's Walkman series or Nokia's multimedia phones, I'm sure people will want to load up their phone with many music files. For that, you can buy yourself any microSD memory card up to 2GB and insert it just under the SIM slot.

Multimedia

The candybar features 40 channels polyphonic sounds, less than previous Chocolate models, but seems to offer a good multimedia experience. It sounds pretty good with the stereo wired headset included in the package. You can even use other headphones thanks to the 2.5mm compatible remote control. The music player included in the Prada phone is different and looks much better than those found in any other LG model. Unfortunately, you won't have any complex functions like equalizer or stereo widening to improve the quality of the sound. Still, the music sounds very loud when you set the volume to the max and isn't really not devoid of bass.

On a scale from 1 to 10, I would give this phone a 7, especially because the big wired headsets have been replaced with others which are smaller and fit much better into your ears. You can set any MP3 files as ring tone if you open the music player first and play them or you can go to Profiles and personalize the caller ringtone. Don't forget that you must put the MP3 files in the MP3 folder on the phone's memory or on the external memory (microSD card). There's no way to associate any MP3 files to Message alerts or any other alert except for the ring tones. The basic FM Radio doesn't have any RDS capabilities and it can only memorize 12 base stations. Furthermore, the reception is pretty good, but surprisingly enough, you cannot run it in the background.

Battery

This is probably the weakest point. Even if LG didn't state more than 3 hours of talk time

and 300 hours of standby, what if the real numbers are lower than this? The 800 mAh Li-Ion battery didn't last more than 4 days on a light use and no more than 2 and a half days on a heavy use. There's not much to say about the phone's battery only that it simply SUCKS.

Impressions

LG Prada is one of the nicest candybars on the market and I'm not the only one who thinks that (see how many prizes it got). Its design is almost flawless and offers a surprisingly great functionality through its touchscreen. This is definitely a fashionistas phone and no businessman will want to buy it. At the moment, this is the best-looking LG handset; what's it gonna be next?

The Good

Glancing at any latest LG handset you cannot avoid noticing their stylish and innovative designs, and LG Prada has them both ... 100%. Its lightweight and its perfect ergonomics put it in a "One man show" position and recommend it for heavy worldwide sale. The innovative touchscreen technology improves the functionality even if this is no smartphone. These features will surely be enough to please most of the LG brand fans and conquer the hearts of any fashionistas.

The Bad

I'm trying to figure out why every time I'm using an LG handset I discover so many software related bugs. This is becoming embarrassing for LG who usually makes great good-looking phones, but the lack of a good firmware will only handicap the phone's functionality. Bad software is probably the most important thing I noticed on LG Prada. The second one is the low power battery which will probably convince you not to buy this phone, but when it comes to tastes… who can tell for sure? I would recommend people that are using text messaging heavily to avoid this phone as it lacks a virtual QWERTY keyboard, unless you are a very patient person of course.

Sales package

LG KE850 Prada
Battery Li-Ion 800mAh
Charger 230V/EU
Cleaner
Leather case
256 MB microSD memory card
microSD adapter
Headset with remote control
USB Cable
CD ROM with software
User Guide

Photo: Tudor Raiciu for Softpedia.com