

## Sony Ericsson P1i

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# Power of one



Until now, Sony Ericsson's P-series smartphones have been all about business. However, the latest **P1i** cranks up the multimedia presence for one big business and pleasure love-in



**S**ONY Ericsson P-series Symbian smartphones have amassed a loyal following since the first incarnation, the P800i, rocked up in 2002. However, their dedication was severely tested on the last Sony Ericsson P990i model that initially arrived riddled with OS instability and nasty bugs. The next P-series incarnation, the Sony Ericsson P1i, is looking to restore some faith and you get the feeling the manufacturer has learnt from the P990i disappointments, launching a revamped and vastly improved smartphone that's cooking right from the off.

### Compact and canny

Anyone who uses a P990i or has even seen it in the flesh will know it's a brute. There are no such worries with the P1i. Sony Ericsson's designers have gutted the format that's served the P-series over four incarnations and taken its design cues from the M600i messenger phone. Parading a more streamlined torso, the P1i is in fact 25% more compact than its predecessor. At 124g, it just about qualifies as pocketable, but you will still feel a bulge in the trouser pouch or suit pocket. Of course, such a major redesign means compromises have been made; the P990i's full but miniature QWERTY keyboard has been replaced by the dual-function variety seen on the Sony Ericsson M600i. Otherwise, it's meticulously constructed with a solid metallic and soft paint finish.

### Symbian smartphone

It's no surprise to see Sony Ericsson persevere with the Symbian UIQ platform – it bought

the rights to the OS after all – but this Symbian flavour isn't to everyone's taste. Navigation is directed via a stylus-driven touch-screen, but outside of this marginal technique, actual operation around the interface isn't particularly troublesome. Previous P-series users will have to adjust to not having a mechanical numerical keypad with the important soft and command keys appearing on screen, while newcomers will need time to familiarise themselves with the Symbian UIQ quirks, although generally it's pretty intuitive to master. Also remember the Symbian UIQ platform is open to third-party applications with over 350 currently available. An easy-to-use left-sided jog-dial and accompanying back key are your other navigational aids, while sitting on the right is a dedicated customisable short cut key for up to seven preconfigured main features.

### Multi-tasker

The collapsible Today menu showing emails, message inbox, calendar and tasks is present and correct, but Sony Ericsson has also expanded the P990i's five customisable homescreen short cut icons to 15. You can assign pretty much any function, no matter how obscure, to this collapsible menu system, so accessing the main menu almost becomes a redundant activity.

To make the P1i more efficient, Sony Ericsson has allocated double the RAM memory (128MB) and included a processor that's four times speedier than the previous model. This allows more effective multi-tasking and numerous



## Focus on: 3.2-megapixel camera

By including a 3.2-megapixel camera, you can tell Sony Ericsson is trying to stretch the P1i's appeal beyond the business fraternity and attract those multimedia-hungry early adopters. The P990i featured a two-megapixel lens, so it feels like a natural progression. The camera manages to include auto-focus and macro for close-ups, but sadly isn't packing a Xenon flash. Instead, you get a flash that's between Xenon and a crude LED flash light, but its illumination performance is still uneven and inconsistent to really improve your snaps in low-lighting conditions. It's fine when it hits the spot, but more often the results are hit and miss.

A dedicated side shutter key fires up the camera and enables you to operate and hold the P1i like a proper digital camera. The user interface is understandably based around the lucid Cyber-shot phone system as seen in the Sony Ericsson K800i, K810i and K550i, but this time navigating via the touch-screen. This isn't particularly ideal or convenient, especially when you're wielding a stylus and sometimes we found our fingers too fat to work the fiddly scrolling and commands. The jog-wheel can be used to scroll through the settings options and this is far easier than using the touch-screen.

The P1i offers all the photographic settings like white balance, shoot mode, night mode, self-timer and a smattering of effects. A 3x digital zoom is also available for prowling in for close-ups, but remember picture quality deteriorates the further you zoom in.

You won't be disappointed with the final photos and they're just about comparable in quality to the P1i's K800i and K810i Cyber-shot cousins. The P1i delivers a good level of detail and contrast (especially on macro mode), strong colour and tones and keen focus.



applications to be open and working simultaneously without affecting its performance. Touch the task manager icon in the top left-hand corner and this will tell you what programmes are running, but the P1i could seemingly handle over 10 without losing its thread.

We were informed by Sony Ericsson at the P1i launch that a QWERTY keyboard is the preferred text input method for Europeans, while the Japanese favour touch-screen methods. Either way, the P1i covers all bases with the dual-function QWERTY, a virtual on-screen

keyboard and, if you have the patience and skill to learn, handwriting recognition. The dual-function QWERTY keyboard assigns two letters to one key, relying on a rocker switch to differentiate. The P1i's design works better than the Sony Ericsson M600i and, while you will be slower to begin with as it takes a good few days to pick up speed, persist and it soon becomes second nature.

### Business brain

Just like its predecessor, the Sony Ericsson P1i has all the PIM, organisation and email trimmings

for the business bod. You can either set up push-email manually (so have all those outgoing server settings ready), or use the embedded email setup wizard. The P1i supports the usual push-email suspects like BlackBerry Connect, Visto and Seven, but Microsoft's Exchange ActiveSync 2003 already comes installed, so you can easily sync with your corporate IT setup.

The Quick Office suite and Adobe software lets you create, edit and read Microsoft Word and spreadsheet documents or email attachments as well as view PowerPoint and PDFs. On paper,

the built-in Business Card Scanner is a convenient business tool, taking the hassle out of inputting contacts. Unfortunately, in reality, it's a bit of a disjointing affair. After firing up the application, you take a snap of a business card, letting it cleverly process the on-screen info (this takes around 15 seconds), then you'll be presented with a complete contact. The picture needs to be taken under good lighting and shot in focus to get results, but even with the right conditions, it continually misread information and even got some fields mixed up. Only when Sony Ericsson fine-tunes this application will it become beneficial.

### Play away

P-series devices have always been primarily business orientated, but Sony Ericsson is heavily leaning



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# Sony Ericsson P1i

- **Size** 106x55x147mm
- **Weight** 124g
- **Display** 262,000 colours
- **Resolution** 240x320 pixels
- **Camera** 3.2 megapixels/VGA
- **Video recording/playback/streaming** Yes/yes/yes
- **Video calling** Yes
- **Audio playback** MP3, AAC, AAC+, eAAC+
- **Ringtones** Polyphonic, MP3, AAC
- **Radio** Yes
- **Connectivity** Bluetooth, USB, infrared, Wi-Fi, A2DP
- **Internal memory** 160MB
- **Memory card slot** MemoryStick Micro M2 (512MB card supplied)
- **Messaging** SMS, MMS, IM
- **Internet browser** WAP/xHTML/HTML
- **Email client** POP3, SMTP, IMAP4
- **Java** Yes
- **Games** QuadraPop, Vijay Singh Pro Golf 3D
- **GPRS** Yes
- **Frequency** Tri-band + 3G
- **Talktime** 210 mins (3G), 600 mins (GSM)
- **Standby** 250 hours (3G), 440 hours (GSM)



## Features

- Symbian UIQ OS
- 3.2-megapixel camera
- Built-in Wi-Fi
- Dual-function QWERTY keyboard
- Push-email and PIM functionality
- Full HTML web browser



## Also consider

### Nokia N95

The P1i comes close to matching the Nokia N95's multimedia convergence prowess. Although Sony Ericsson's device is more business like, the N95 has the feature advantage with a five-megapixel camera and built-in GPS.

## Pros

Based on previous P-series efforts, the Sony Ericsson P1i is incredibly compact and supremely built for such a powerful multimedia specimen.

## Cons

The dual QWERTY keyboard and touch-screen-driven user interface may not sit well with everyone

## MC SCORE

★ ★ ★ ★ ☆

<b>Verdict</b> By far the best P-series smartphone we've seen, with a new-look heavyweight multimedia performance to match its business acumen.	<b>Look and feel</b>	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
	<b>Ease of use</b>	★ ★ ★ ☆ ☆
	<b>Features</b>	★ ★ ★ ★ ☆
	<b>Performance</b>	★ ★ ★ ★ ☆
	<b>Battery life</b>	★ ★ ★ ★ ☆

## Sony Ericsson P1i continued

towards a more multimedia and fun vibe with the P1i, fitting a 3.2-megapixel camera with auto-focus (see box), QVGA-quality video-recording capabilities, a built-in music player with Stereo Bluetooth support and a more accomplished web browser.

The web-browsing experience is much more seamless than before, using the Opera 8 browser to fit the webpages neatly onto the three-inch QVGA-quality screen. Of course, you can set it to show the full page in all its HTML glory and switch viewing orientation to landscape. The P1i will find the best available connection for the internet surfer starting with Wi-Fi, then down the pecking order to 3G and then GPRS. Webpages load like the clappers over Wi-Fi, but 3G is still sufficiently brisk if you are outside the range of a hotspot. Sony Ericsson has also introduced two new tricks to make web browsing far friendlier, including a tab system, so you can open separate websites on different pages simultaneously and easily flit between them. Plus, setting up RSS feeds is much easier with the browser flagging up compatible websites.

### Music maestro

While it may not have the sharp graphics of a Walkman phone, the P1i's music player still delivers a strong audio performance. You can sort through your tunes via artists, albums, tracks and playlists (these can be created on the fly) and you have 11 equaliser settings at your disposal to boost the sound. We found the Megabass setting perfect for adding a bit of drive and meat to the fidelity. Hooking up Bluetooth headphones is also a breeze with our MOTOROKR S9's connecting in seconds and we were treated to a voluminous and feisty sound.

The built-in FM radio with RDS (Radio Data System) is also comprehensive, automatically



searching and presetting the top 15 radio shows, including BBC programmes, Virgin, Capital and XFM. You can activate the RDS feature for news and traffic announcements and it automatically switches channels when these are broadcasting elsewhere. You have to plug in the supplied headphones with the integrated aerial before you can start listening, but there's also an auto-retuning setting when the signal falters.

### Verdict

The P1i feels like a zenith of sorts for the P-series smartphone range. It's a culmination of the work Sony Ericsson has put into its smartphone series, which has resulted in a more realised device with superior multimedia weaponry. The Sony Ericsson P1i is definitely a contender for smartphone of the year.

Nick Renshaw  
info@mobilechoiceuk.com