

Huawei export ban claims another victim: Huawei's \$2,600 foldable smartphone

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The Huawei export ban has claimed another victim. The embattled Chinese company told CNBC that it is now delaying perhaps its most anticipated product, the \$2,600 Mate X foldable smartphone. Huawei's official explanation is that it wants to avoid a Samsung Galaxy Fold-level launch disaster, so the company is holding the device back for more tuning. But the Trump administration's export ban is undoubtedly a contributing factor. That policy has shut Huawei off from so many suppliers that it could not launch a new smartphone right now if it wanted to. Huawei cancelled a laptop launch just a few days ago, in fact.

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The Mate X was originally scheduled for the middle of the year, with a rumored launch this month, but now CNBC reports that the Mate X launch will be delayed until September. Huawei doesn't officially blame this delay on the export ban, instead

telling CNBC it didn't "want to launch a product to destroy our reputation." CNBC writes that Huawei will use this delay to do "extra testing with mobile carriers around the world and developers to make sure their apps work when the device is fully unfolded."

It is hard to believe Huawei's official explanation here, especially in light of the laptop launch it canceled just a few days ago. The export ban means Huawei cannot ship new devices running US-made operating systems like Windows and Android, and the wide scope of US export regulations means many hardware components are off-limits, too. Huawei has not shown the capability to launch anything since the export ban went into effect.

Still, CNBC confusingly writes that the export ban is not an issue here. "Huawei's spokesperson said that even with the blacklisting, it is 'confident' it can deliver this device to consumers," the report states. "He added that the Mate X will run Google's Android operating system because it was launched before Huawei was placed on the Entity List."

The Mate X was not "launched" before the Huawei export ban—we are writing about the delay of the Mate X launch right now! It was *announced* before the export ban, but talking about a product should not have any legal bearing on the export ban.

Huawei currently has a 90-day window to "support existing mobile services," so current customers can continue to have functional devices with support and security updates, and that's it. The 90-day window started May 20, 2019, so it will end before the theoretical launch of the Mate X in September.

Foldable phone failures

- The Huawei Mate X uses one big wraparound display made by BOE.

- You get a huge 8-inch display when open and a 6.6-inch display when closed.
- The back has a 6.38-inch display, along with this component bar for cameras, buttons, and ports.
- The three cameras on the bar pull double-duty for selfies and regular photos.
- Huawei's patented hinge tries to flatten out the screen by expanding when it opens.
- When opened up, you get a huge 8-inch Android tablet.
- There's a fingerprint reader on the side.
- There are batteries in both halves of the device, for a total of 4500mAh.
- Here's a fun look at the inside of the device. The 5G components are highlighted.
- Get ready to use some Android tablet apps.

Regardless of Huawei's true reasons for delaying the Mate X, the move is the latest in what has been a disappointing first year for foldable smartphones. The Mate X, which was announced in February, looked like an incredible phone. The device featured a wraparound display that showed a huge 6.6-inch display area in phone mode, and it opened up into an even huger 8-inch tablet. It seemed like a much more elegant design than the Galaxy Fold, which featured a clunkier two-screen design with an oddly shaped 4.6-inch display on the front.

Samsung tried to launch its foldable smartphone, the Galaxy Fold, in April. But the lead-up to that launch was a complete catastrophe. In anticipation of the official April 26 release date, the \$2,000 Galaxy Fold was sent to a small group of reviewers, and Samsung's phone of the future quickly started dying. Some reviewers killed the phone by peeling off the screen protector (which you are not supposed to do) and damaging the display, and other models died due to debris entering the phone hinge and damaging the display. Pictures of Galaxy Folds with half-black displays quickly went viral, and Samsung was forced to delay the device.

We still don't know if the Galaxy Fold is ever launching again. Back in April, Samsung said it "plan[ned] to announce the [new] release date in the coming weeks" for the Galaxy Fold, but it's nearly two months later and we still don't have a firm release date. Many retailers have cancelled pre-orders for the Galaxy Fold, and while the company keeps claiming it is making progress on fixing the Fold, the last we heard from Samsung was that the phone would not launch in June or July.

If Huawei really was experiencing the same durability problems as Samsung, we would expect to hear something about how it was reworking the design to stop debris entering the back of the display. Instead the company only said it was doing "carrier testing" and "app testing," which doesn't sound like it found any show-stopping design problems.

It's hard to imagine either one of these phones being good if they do actually launch. A major enabler for a good foldable smartphone will be a more durable display cover. Right now, the only option is a flexible plastic cover, which sounds like an easily scratchable nightmare for a design like the Mate X. Corning, the makers of the ubiquitous Gorilla Glass display cover that appears on nearly every high-end phone, promises that it is working on *foldable* glass for smartphones, but that could be years away. Until then, foldable smartphones all seem like very fragile early-adopter devices.

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