Motorola’s “Satellite Link” hotspot lets you send messages via outer space

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- The Motorola Hotspot. It connects to the satellite network and has Bluetooth. That’s it.
- The device is dead-simple, with no screen and only a few lights and buttons.
- Here’s what all the buttons do.
- The lanyard strap is nice.
- The messaging app.

If you’re still jealous of the iPhone 14’s ability to do satellite messaging, Motorola has a Bluetooth accessory that will help you feel less left out. The Motorola Defy Satellite Link is officially for sale today, following its announcement in February. This is basically a satellite messaging hotspot—it’s a box with Bluetooth, a battery, and a chip that will give you a satellite connection. You pair your phone to it, run the app, and you can start firing text messages into outer space. The hotspot is $150 and will work today on Android and iOS devices in the US.

The iPhone 14 made satellite messaging the hot new thing when it was announced last year, and competitors are just starting to appear. The big difference between Motorola’s hotspot and an iPhone (and the reason why you might want Motorola’s option

even if you have an iPhone 14) is that the iPhone 14 only sends a specially crafted SOS message to emergency services—a keyboard is not involved in the process at all, it's just for emergency usage. The Motorola hotspot is not just for emergencies. It does full-blown messaging, where you can type whatever message you want to whoever you want, but via a satellite instead of the usual cellular network.

Motorola's messaging service works just like SMS, but it can only be delivered to other people running the special Bullitt Satellite Messenger app. The service will do SMS forwarding, though, so if you punch in a random number, that person will receive a message prompting them to download the Bullitt app so they can talk to you. It's probably best to set this up with someone beforehand, but it sounds like a great way to communicate when you're off the grid.

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- Motorola's site doesn't clearly explain the pricing plans, but presumably this graphic, from when the device was announced, is still accurate.
- The coverage map, which doesn't include Europe even though Europe is supposedly supported. It's also worth noting service extends "75 miles offshore in coverage map areas."

If you haven't guessed from the app link, Bullitt Satellite is the service provider here, and just like with a cell plan, you'll need to pay a monthly fee for satellite access. The basic "essential" plan is $5 a month for 30 messages each month, with the biggest plan hitting 400 messages for $30 per month. It's also possible to rack up some kind of overage charge.

It seems like a few things have changed since the initial announcement. The original plan was a $99 price tag with no service or an optional $149 price with a year of service. It seems like the $99 option was scrapped. Motorola's site

doesn’t clearly explain what is going on with the access fees, but the sales page for the device from REI says the device includes “one year of SOS service and one year of the essential service plan.” The service runs on Inmarsat satellites, a company that has been around since the 1970s and has 14 satellites in geostationary orbit. That REI page also says, “Current service areas include the continental US and Europe; Canada and Alaska will be available by September 2023,” and that coverage extends “up to 75 miles off-shore in coverage map areas.”

Keep in mind this service isn’t going to be the lightning-fast cellular access you’re probably used to, and Bullitt says, “The time to initially connect to the satellite and send a message is around 10 seconds.”

Motorola Defy Smartphone Satellite Link

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For specs, the little Bluetooth box has a 600 mAh battery which is apparently enough for “up to four full days” of runtime. The whole thing is powered by the MediaTek MT6825 satellite connectivity chip, which is built to use the new 3GPP NTN (Non-Terrestrial Network) standard. The device is IP68 rated and claims to be “waterproof up to 1.5m for 30 minutes. It also has GPS for location tracking. Buttons on the side let you “check in” quickly or trigger an emergency call.

Motorola’s site still says the device is only up for pre-order, but a press release in our inbox assures us this is really for sale. Motorola says the device can be found at “AT&T, REI Co-op, Bass Pro.com, B&H Photo, Nomadic Supply, BlackOvis.com, GoHunt.com, and other major retailers.”

Listing image by Motorola

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