The Backbone One would be an ideal game controller—if the iPhone had more games

In theory, it ought to be as good a time as ever to be a gamer on the iPhone.

Classic console emulators have rolled out to the platform for the first time, and they work great. There are strong libraries of non-skeezy mobile games on Apple Arcade and Netflix Games, streaming via Xbox and PlayStation services is continuing apace, and there are even a few AAA console games now running natively on the platform, like Assassin’s Creed and Resident Evil titles.

Some of those games need a traditional, dual-stick game controller to work well, though, and Apple bafflingly offers no first-party solution for this.

Yes, you can sync popular Bluetooth controllers from Sony, Microsoft, Nintendo, and 8bitdo with your iPhone, but that’s not really the ideal answer—your iPhone isn’t a big TV sitting across the room or a computer monitor propped up on your desk.

A few companies have jumped in to solve this with attachable controllers that give the iPhone a Nintendo Switch or Steam Deck-like form factor (albeit a lot smaller). There’s a wide range of quality, though, and some of the ones you’ll see advertised aren’t very well made.

There’s some debate out there, but there’s one that just about anyone will at least put up for consideration: the Backbone One. That’s the one I picked for my new iPhone 16 Pro Max,

which I have loaded with emulators and tons of games.

Since many folks are about to get iPhone 16s for the holidays and might be in the market for something similar, I figured it’d be a good time to write some quick impressions, including pros and cons. Is this thing worth a $99 price tag? What about its subscription-based app?

Switching from the Razer Kishi

Here’s some background, real quick: I previously owned an iPhone 13 Pro, and I played a lot of *Diablo Immortal*. I wanted to try the controller experience with that game, so I bought a first-generation Razer Kishi—which I liked for the most part. It had excellent thumbsticks that felt similar to those you’d find on an Xbox controller, if a little bit softer.

https://arstechnica.com/gadgets/2024/12/iphone-gaming-controller/