The new iPhone SE is a shockingly good value

Yesterday, Apple announced the new $399 iPhone SE. The TL;DR appears to be really simple: the iPhone 8's body, the iPhone 11's processor, and the iPhone XR's camera system with a few new capabilities. I'll obviously wait to review this phone to tell you if it's any good, but assuming Apple lives up to its usual standards I can tell you something right away:

At $399, the second-generation iPhone SE is a shockingly good value.

The most important thing to know about the SE's value proposition is simply that it has the A13 Bionic processor, which is bar-none the fastest processor you can get on any smartphone at any price, full stop. You could spend $1,449 on a fully maxed-out iPhone 11 Pro Max and it wouldn't be faster than the iPhone SE. You could spend $1599.99 on a maxed-out Samsung Galaxy S20 Ultra 5G and it would be theoretically *slower* (with the exception of 5G downloads).

This isn't just a matter of processor megahertz per buck, it's a matter of the longevity of the phone itself. More than any other phone company, Apple supports its phones for a very long time. Since this iPhone SE has the most modern processor available, it's quite likely that it will receive software updates for many years to come.

Hell, Apple even did the right thing with storage: offering a humane 64GB at the base level and making the 128GB model only $50 more.

Over the course of 2019, we marveled at the level of quality

you could get in a long series of relatively inexpensive Android phones. That's still true today, but those phones will receive three years of updates from Google at most. And as my colleague Chris Welch will argue later today, the iPhone SE sets a bar that the upcoming Google Pixel 4A will have an incredibly difficult time clearing.

Again, we'll need to review the new iPhone SE and the Pixel 4A to know whether one of them has an advantage with any particular feature (like the camera). So no final judgements here. But I just need to point out that for most of 2018 and 2019, every Android maker has had a bit of a green field to play in: phones that cost less than $500.

Google, Asus, Samsung, and many others did good work in that green field, but now there's real competition from Apple.

On Tuesday in this newsletter, I had half a thought about these low-cost phones. Forgive me for quoting myself:

> *Increasingly, I find that "flagship" phones are mainly about luxuries instead of tangible benefits to most people. Those luxuries include screen quality, 5G, wireless charging, face unlock, speed, overall build quality, camera quality, and a smattering of other things.*

Will the iPhone SE match the iPhone 11 or 11 Pro on most of those metrics? Nope. But when I wrote that I hadn't imagined that Apple would use its newest chip. The inclusion of the A13 Bionic means the SE will match the most luxurious phone on speed and on longevity.

I know I've now brought up software updates twice now, but it's *super important*. $399 spent on this iPhone SE means it's less likely you'll be forced to spend another $399 next year or the year after.

There are several things to be bummed about with the iPhone SE

2 — starting with the fact that Apple calls it the "second-generation iPhone SE," which is a bad name. Eventually we'll settle on what to call it, but until then prepare for iPhone SE, second-generation iPhone SE, iPhone SE 2, iPhone SE (2020), the new iPhone SE, and probably something I can't imagine right now. Ugh.

It doesn't matter that it's a parts bin phone if the parts are good

I kid, that's not really a real problem. Neither is the claim that this is just a "parts bin" phone. Yes, Apple is using a lot of parts that have been bouncing around its product lines for years. But, and I want you to really feel this: *who cares*? It doesn't matter how old the parts are if they're good.

No, there are real issues we know about already just from the basics. For example, this form factor — the same as the iPhone 6 — isn't especially inspiring. I hate the size of the bezels. It seems like a petty complaint, but reducing them really does change your experience. You get more screen in a smaller body. Plus, it's something most Android phones accomplished by putting a fingerprint sensor on the back or under the screen.

Speaking of size, this iPhone SE is larger than the last iPhone SE, which means that even 'small' phones are big now, as Dan Seifert observed yesterday. Finding a truly good, truly small smartphone is nigh impossible right now.

Yes, it's okay to be a little bummed about the missing headphone jack

And though I know many people will tell me to *just get over it already*, the fact that this low-cost iPhone lacks a traditional headphone jack is a bit of a bummer. Other low-cost Android phones explicitly include them. Bluetooth headphones aren't just another thing to charge, they're another thing to buy and another thing that could break.

Apple has a reputation for overcharging for hardware. It's become a point of contention in the flamewars between Apple,

Windows, and Android stans. My take is that sometimes Apple is guilty and sometimes it's not. The new MacBook Air is a great value. Selling Mac Pro wheels for $699 and literal metal posts for $299 is so incredibly hilarious that even pointing out that it's become self-parody feels so obvious it's embarrassing.

On that spectrum, the new iPhone SE (or whatever we decide to call it) is not just a good value for Apple. It's one of the very best values I've seen in the smartphone market in years. In theory, at least: now we just have to test it and see if it lives up to its spec sheet.

More from Apple's announcements

 Apple's second-gen iPhone SE is here: all the news and details. Here's a story stream of all of our iPhone SE 2 coverage.

 The iPhone SE 2's camera setup is going to lean on Apple's software. Jon Porter on how Apple's advances in image processing are going to be vital to this phone's success.

 Apple's new iPhone SE doesn't come with custom U1 locator chip. It's not in the new iPad Pro with LiDAR either, where you would think it would make sense as the iPad Pro is practically designed for AR and AR development. I don't know what's up with the U1 chip (or AirTags), but increasingly it feels like something is weird about the whole thing.

 Apple's new Magic Keyboard for the iPad Pro goes up for preorder, ships next week. Here's something unexpected! Long ago I promised to share my thoughts on the trackpad support in iPadOS but haven't really finished that thought yet. When I review this, I will.

More from The Verge

 Dell’s new XPS 13 is everything a Windows laptop should be. Monica Chin on what is going to be a contender for best Windows laptop of 2020, if not best laptop full stop:

> *The XPS 13 speaks for itself. This isn’t a laptop that’s trying to push boundaries or rewrite the rules; it’s just giving users what they want. I would take a better webcam, I would take better cooling, I would take a USB-A, and I would take a slightly more color-accurate screen. But none of those are glaring flaws because they aren’t big impediments to the user experience. And in the areas that matter most — build, display, keyboard, touchpad, battery life, performance — the XPS 13 doesn’t just check all the boxes. It blows the boxes off the page.*

 The TurboGrafx-16 Mini is a great plug-and-play console that doubles as a history lesson. Andrew Webster reviews:

> *The TurboGrafx-16 Mini fills a different niche. For many people, it won’t be a chance to revisit classic games from their youth, but instead an opportunity to discover a period of retro gaming they likely missed the first time.*

 Google and Apple’s COVID-19 tracking system can’t save lives all on its own. Nicole Wetsman on what the rollout of this system should actually look like. It’s clearly built to be part of a larger system of testing and communal action. If the latter doesn’t come, the former won’t be of use (and could actually be a detriment). As ever, we need more testing, more PPE, and consistent guidance from political leaders. All three are in short supply.

 How GM and Ford switched out pickup trucks for breathing machines. Sean O’Kane explains how ventilators are much more complicated than you might realize.

> *Automakers are well-suited for these partnerships for a few reasons, according to Adrian Price, the global vehicle engineering director at Ford who's overseeing the company's ventilator effort. Not only do these companies already work with components that are similar to the ones found in ventilators, but cars are highly complex products that require a unique amount of knowledge, planning, coordination, and logistics to build.*

 Russia conducts another test of its missile system to take out satellites. Loren Grush explains many of the reasons why these tests are not a good idea.

> *ASAT tests are also widely condemned by many in the space community, as these demonstrations typically create hundreds to thousands of pieces of debris that can last for months, and even years, in orbit. Because these tests are high speed and high impact, the resulting debris can spread far and wide. Those pieces then pose a threat to other functioning spacecraft. A fast-moving piece of junk can render an operational satellite inoperable if they hit head on.*

 What 'Payment Status Not Available' on the IRS coronavirus aid site means. Bad error messages are terrible in the best situations. Here, it's awful, and Adi Robertson tells us exactly why this dark pattern is a huge problem.

 How a new book about Instagram changes our understanding of the founders' departure. Casey Newton has a review and some insight on Sarah Frier's new book: *No Filter: The Inside Story of Instagram*. I've fallen out of my reading habit since I started working from home so much, but I am excited enough about this book that I think it'll push me back into it again.

 Ecobee's new security camera doubles as an Alexa speaker. Dan Seifert looks at Ecobee's new product line, which you can turn into an inexpensive home security system.

The device is actually just one piece of a new home security platform, which the company calls Haven. In addition to the new SmartCamera, Ecobee is also introducing SmartSensor for doors and windows, a combination entrance and motion sensor that’s not unlike Google’s Nest Detect.

https://www.theverge.com/2020/4/16/21223187/new-iphone-se-price-value-processor