

BlackBerry Bold 9000 Review

The BlackBerry Bold is the flagship model that sports plenty of features, albeit in a large package. Up against the BlackBerry Curve the handset is noticeably bigger with a bigger screen, bigger keyboard and bigger form factor.

This extra size (115.5 x 62.1 x 12.3mm vs. 107 x 60 x 15.5mm compared to the Curve) means it's not going to fit in your top pocket happily, or look diminutive in your hand, however against the current flagship - the 8800, users will notice a more rounded device that has a much greater consumer feel to it.



But it is not just a size change that the handset offers over its BlackBerry brothers. The gloss black front sports a large half-VGA quality screen, new flush shortcut keys and the full QWERTY keyboard BlackBerry users are known to love.

The back sports a faux leather black plate that covers the insides as well as surrounding the 2-megapixel camera with flash, although RIM has still left a big enough well in the design for it to get clogged up with dirt on a regular basis like previous models. Why it can't make it flush is beyond us.

The sides reveal an urge to be more consumer-friendly than in the past and RIM has opted for hot swap microSD card slot, 3.5mm jack, Mini-USB charging and connecting port and further shortcuts to volume, voice dialling and a dedicated camera button.

Turn it on (if you're a real BlackBerry user you'll only ever do this once) and the first thing you'll notice is that screen: bright, crisp and clear. Cleaner than the iPhone and visually as strong as the HTC diamond, the new icons really help sell the interface.

That interface is completely different from previous incarnations. We've got a handset direct from RIM so it hard to tell if the operators in the UK will put their own skin on the device. Let's hope not.

Along the bottom of the new home screen you get a series of icons for accessing your favourite applications. The list is actually devised from the top row of applications within the application page. If you've got the Diary as one of your top row applications it will appear on the home screen. It's as simple as that. It's a really nice feature and one we really like. The top of the home screen gives you quick stats on battery, profile, network, date, Wi-Fi, Bluetooth and whether you're on 3G or not.

Using the now defacto "Pearl" trackerball you can whizz through the icons or merely press the menu button to access the full list.

There are 18 icons on the screen at once with more scrollable downwards. Unlike the iPhone there aren't multiple pages to scroll through, however you can move icons and therefore applications around easily so your most frequent ones are at the top for quick access.

To help you manage the icons you can create folders so you can bunch all your games together or chat applications for example and it's all very easy to manage and use.

Get past the application interface and the BlackBerry Bold has plenty of applications and features to get your teeth into.

There is GPS, a Diary, a browser, camera, email, games, search, alarm clock, contacts book, MMS support and a full multimedia suite allowing you to watch video, listen to music, view images and that's before you start downloading additional apps like Facebook, Google Maps and Opera Mini.

Like previous models in the BlackBerry range, the GPS can be used for turn-based navigation (the screen is big enough too) or to add geotag data to your pictures. The BlackBerry Bold comes with RIM's own and rather basic Maps application, which will get you from A to B, although there are better third party applications available if you are going to use this as your main satnav device and Google Map fans can still download Google Maps.

Rather than list every single app available, highlights worth noting are the alarm clock app that offer so much more. Realising that BlackBerry addicts (you know who you are) normally take their phone to bed with them you can now have the clock feature go full screen when the phone is plugged into the charger.

Furthermore, beyond the three different styles of clock, you can choose there is also something called "Bedside mode" that dims the screen, turns off the LED (the one that flashes red when you've got mail) and if you don't want to be disturbed, actually turns the phone radio off so you can't get calls. It's a really nice feature and one that I am sure many BlackBerry fans will appreciate. It's like Research In Motion has actually thought about how their phones will be used.

Still keeping with the consumer, angle the multimedia elements have been increased and improved on. We've already mentioned the hot swappable microSD slot on the side and the 2-megapixel camera, but the Multimedia player has been improved as well to benefit from the new screen.

While the interface is still as basic as ever, video playback is stunning and easily good enough to allow you to watch movies or other content with little effort. Additionally a nice trick is that when you opt to play YouTube videos, they automatically load into the video player so you have greater control over the files.

Finally on the consumer front is that this BlackBerry supports MMS and video recording (something a certain phone from Apple doesn't).

So the Bold can do consumer, what about the core feature browsing and email?

On the email front it's business as usual with the HTML support now being added so you can view images without having to worry about attachments. Emails open quickly, content, whether you are on Wi-Fi or 3G, is downloaded quickly, and overall it's the same experience that if you are already a BlackBerry user will know and love.

Where the BlackBerry wins out over the Apple iPhone is that you can very quickly search email to find what you are after, you can cut, copy and paste, view HTML messages in plain text, restrict your download sizes, your roaming actions and plenty more.

New features we've found include an improved focus on search allowing you to search instantly by Sender or Subject, something that is surprisingly helpful, as well as having greater control over how the messages are displayed.

As for the browser experience, BlackBerry has added desktop and column view options. The desktop allows you to view the webpage as if you were on a standard browser. Using the Pearl trackball you can then move around the page. The column view allows you to zoom into specific parts of the page for supposedly easier viewing.

On a speed front you'll notice a massive difference other GPRS devices and it's nice to see RIM finally adding 3G connectivity to a device that is consumer friendly.

Overall though browsing on the phone is still a pig with you having to scroll too much with the trackball.

Switching between Column view, Desktop view and Mobile view is all too confusing and compared to the iPhone the web browsing experience is poor at best.

Yes you will be able to access sites lightening fast, but could you do any serious surfing on this? No.

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