Palm Zire 71

At first, I was cheesed off because I had purchased an m515 about a month before the Zire 71 was announced by Palm because, at the time, the m515 was the best price/performance value, in my opinion. Since the Zire 71 was offered with a built in camera and MP3 playing functionality for only $50 more than the m515, after I got over my original bout of swearing and disappointment, I decided to bite the bullet and attempt to trade up.

Inside is my review of the Zire 71.

So, first impressions: The screen is amazing. Very low-glare, at 320x320, it's 4 times the resuolution of the m515. It's plastic, where the m515 was mostly metal, so it can feel kind of cheap and flimsy. The stylus, which is also plastic, doesn't have the proper weight to sit in your hand. It's much too light. In addition to the normal four function buttons on the bottom and nstead of the usual up and down buttons, is a 4-way joystick. This offers a little more flexibility, but it can be hard to tell if you've actually pressed it, so you can end up going further down in your document than you thought.

The processor is completely different. As with all Palm OS 5 devices, the Zire 71 uses an OMAP Arm processor running at 144 Mhz. It is reams and reams faster than the 33 Mhz DragonBall processor than ran the M515. Even though I had mine overclocked to 66 Mhz most of the time, the Zire 71 still puts it in the dust. Menu changes happen *instantly* instead of waiting for that split second.

The built in software is pretty much the same as every other Palm, with the exception of the zire71.jpg camera software and photo viewer. The accompanying software is pretty neat though. It comes with a video player, MP3 player, and some other stuff I didn't really look at.

Kinoma Video Player has a PC-based part for converting MPEGs, AVIs, etc. into a Palm compatible format (and reducing them to 320x320), and a Palm-based part for actually playing and managing them on the device. I have a 256 Megabyte SD card so I managed to cram on a whole bunch of crap. *Tripping the Rift* played surprisingly well. I was impressed.

The MP3 player did not fare so well.

Unfortunately, Palm has decided to bundle the piece of shit that is RealPlayer, or rather now RealOne with their devices. Real is second only to MusicMatch on my list of despised media players. I didn't even bother installing this one on the Palm. I got as far as the splash screen of the installation and cancelled it.

Obviously, I still want to play MP3s, so what do I do now? Sureley there is a shareware or open source MP3 player for Palm OS... My search ended much better than I had hoped. I found AeroPlayer, which not only plays MP3s, but also OGGs! This was fantastic. I installed it and it worked without a hitch. I had no qualms about purchasing the lifetime upgrade key for this piece of software.

Battery life appears to be very good. Playing OGGs during my 35 minute bus ride into the office, the battery meter didn't drop at all. Thankfully, AeroPlayer allows you to turn the screen off while it runs in the background, saving valuable battery life.

The camera is no prize, it only takes pictures at 640x480, but for the time it takes to write them to the card, I wouldn't want them to be any bigger! The digital camera I bought three years ago, the Kodak DC480 is much better in quality and resolution, but it's a little bulky to carry around with me 24/7. The Palm is light, small, and very easy to fit in a pocket so I'll never again have to say, "I wish I had a camera." If I'm ever planning to take pictures, however, I bring my real one.

In conclusion, I wish I had known that this device was going to be released, because I would certainly not have purchased the m515! The Zire 71 completely destroys it in every way I could ever want. WiFi support would be nice, but the Palm that supports that is nearly twice the price. I can live without it....for now.

Edit 06/06/03@22:43 Oh yeah, the thing I forgot to mention is that trasferring files to the SD card via a hotsync is *retardedly* slow. I mean *stupidly* slow. I waited twenty minutes for a 60 meg album of OGGs to transfer over before I gave up. The same album transferred to the card via a card reader took about 25 seconds. Go figure.

Steve gives the Palm Zire 71 Thumbs Up!	thumbsup.gif

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