

Bluetooth Fashion Woes\Treo Déjà vu All Over Again

One of the goofiest looking gadgets ever invented is the Bluetooth headset. I got one recently with my new phone and hesitated to use it, simply because I felt like an idiot walking around, apparently talking to myself with a miniature cycling helmet stuck in my right ear. I began to notice these things while grazing on the freebies at Costco's on Saturday, where it seemed that every other person was mumbling to themselves as they wandered the aisles. Sometimes I thought people were talking to me, so I would respond, the person would stare, and then I would notice the plastic growth on the side of the head. I was too dumb to realize they were actually talking on a phone and not to me. Now I talk to myself all the time, but usually it follows a missed golf shot, and I don't have funny pieces of plastic stuck in my ear. But that was before Bluetooth. Now, I am ashamed to say, I occasionally wear the funny piece of plastic, as it actually works. No microphone in front of your mouth, but you can be heard very clearly, without having to hold a phone to your ear. I still don't have the guts to wear it in public, but I love it in the car, which doesn't count as "public" as I have tinted windows.

The phone that gave me Bluetooth is the Treo 700p. Recall that I swooned over the Treo 600 a couple of years ago. I loved that phone, as it actually did what was promised. It provided a substitute for hauling a laptop around to lots of places, as email and documents could be sent and received, and you could get to the internet for simple issues. The calendar synched flawlessly with Outlook, and on the fly, so if a secretary or paralegal made an appointment or changed a date, I knew it immediately. The incredible number of Palm applications that worked with the phone, including voice recorder software, made it even better.

But it had its drawbacks. The battery could not be replaced, so when it went, so did the phone. The screen was impossible to see in bright sunlight, and the buttons and on-screen touch keys were sometimes hard to deal with, as their location was not intuitive. The phone did not have Bluetooth, and at the time, the internet connection was not broadband. The 650 was the successor, and while I looked hard, the few additional features were not worth the large dollars Verizon wanted, and since I still had a year on my contract, decided to wait. This year the 700w came out, which was the Treo with Windows CE, as opposed to the Palm operating system. I looked at the reviews, and interestingly, most suggested the 650 was the better phone. The 700w had inadequate memory, a screen that was of poorer quality than the 650, and it was harder to navigate through the various screens with Windows than with the Palm OS. So my interest cooled. That and the fact that I still had 7 months on my contract, so no deal.

Then I ran into Charlie Newman at Rotary. (See, he does leave the Tea Shop from time to time). Charlie asked my advice about PDA's and particularly about the new Treo 700. I dutifully parroted back earlier reviews that the 650 was better, Windows CE was not great, blah, blah. He looked at me funny and asked, "did you not know about the 700p? It is coming out soon and is supposed to fix the problems with the 700w." As I am a fraud when it comes to technology, I was not the least bit embarrassed that I had no

clue as to what he was talking about. But then, for all I know, I had read about it a week before and had forgotten it.

I promptly did some research and saw that Charlie was right, that a new phone was coming out, dubbed the Treo 700p, and that Palm had supposedly fixed the 700w issues of memory, screen color and brightness, and navigation. It also had Bluetooth, and could act as a wireless modem for my laptop. The modem feature piqued my interest, as there are times when you simply need internet access on your laptop and wifi is nowhere to be found. And since I was already paying for data, this meant I would not have to spring for a wireless air card, and another \$60/month data contract, which I was loathe to do. As anyone who has ever taken a deposition with Bill Jeter knows, a wireless air card allows a laptop to be connected to the internet from anywhere -- even the City Council bathroom.

As fate would have it, that afternoon my old 600 had a phone phart and had to be reset. Being spiritual and somewhat impatient, I immediately took this as a sign that I needed the new Treo, upgrade eligibility be damned. When I learned that I could upgrade my wife's phone, get what I wanted, switch numbers, and still get the upgrade price, the deal was done. Well, not exactly a deal. The phone was still \$500 with a two year contract, and since my wife sacrificed her ability to upgrade, I am sure I will pay along the way.

Now for the review. There have been issues. I tried to load the new software over the old, and that caused major problems with wireless synch. But they got fixed after several very long support calls. The phone has reset a few times, for no apparent reason, but again, that may have been because of the synch issues. Otherwise, the phone works.

The screen is much brighter, and the broadband access is very fast. The Bluetooth means hands free phone use in the car. The speaker phone has decent sound quality. The camera is 1.3 megapixel, which is not portrait quality, but it takes pretty decent pictures. There is a zoom feature, and a built in camcorder. The keys are backlit, which helps at night. There are two extra buttons to make and end calls. The battery is replaceable. Palm navigation is easy. You can now get GPS on the phone and can download maps with voice directions (www.telenav.com).

There's more. MP3 tunes, and streaming audio and video, thanks to the broadband connection. Built in voice recorder. Docs to Go is loaded, so you now have access to Word, Excel, Power Point and PDF files. Basically, this phone works extremely well for all business applications. For more in depth reviews, try www.palminfo.com.

One last note. I also looked at the Motorola Q, which came out within a week of the Treo. The Q is comparable in many respects, plus it's cheaper, thinner and weighs 2 ounces less. However, you can't create and edit documents in Word as you can on the Treo, and it runs on Windows CE. That won't mean much to many, so at \$419 (Verizon upgrade price), it is a worthy alternative. There is an excellent comparison of both phones at www.infosynchworld.com.

