

Motorola's eco-friendly W233 renew

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With a sleek design and long battery life, the first phone with a casing made from recycled plastic should attract green consumers despite its basic features.



The good: Low-priced phone offers great battery life and attractive, eco-friendly design.

The bad: Lacks a camera and many other features that come standard on most phones.

The bottom line: Great choice for tree huggers who mainly need to make calls and send text messages.

Tree huggers need cell phones, too. They may have found it in Motorola's (MOT) W233 Renew, introduced by T-Mobile USA on Feb. 4.

I tested the Renew for several days recently and can vouch for this much: Motorola went to great lengths to ensure this device is eco-friendly. Renew's makers say the W233 is the world's first phone with a casing made with recycled plastic—in this case, from large water bottles. Through a multiyear development process, Motorola tried to make sure the phone can stand as much dropping and knocking as other handsets. Because it uses recycled plastic, it took 20% less energy to manufacture the casing than one constructed from raw materials. That same casing, which features stylish light green, white, and black colors, is 100% recyclable, as is the device's cardboard packaging. Through an alliance with CarbonFund.org, Motorola also offsets the energy required to manufacture, distribute, and operate the phone through investments in renewable energy sources and reforestation efforts.

So yes, Motorola has produced a feel-good phone. More may follow, assuming the company can stabilize its foundering handset business. "The plan is to look over future products to see where to incorporate the [recycled] materials," explains Melissa Gardner, vice-president for marketing at Motorola.

But eco-friendliness comes at a cost, especially in the case of the Renew, which Motorola wanted to put in the hands of as many people as possible. At a time when green products often carry a premium, T-Mobile is temporarily selling Renew for \$10 with a two-year contract.

To ensure low selling prices, Motorola kept extra features to a minimum. Renew lacks a camera, which comes standard on most mobile devices. Its color screen has low resolution, and while the handset has a Web browser and a digital music player, it's mainly designed for calling and texting.

Long battery life

Digital menus lack verve and ease of use. At boot-up, Motorola's logo appears in black and white. Apparently we still are in Kansas. And you can't start dialing a phone number from the main applications menu, which seems odd.

Still, these are small peeves. Overall, the phone handles calls and text messages quite well. And it's very attractive, especially compared with other phones in this price range, which tend to look clunky. The phone weighs 2.93 ounces and is 4.4 inches long and 1.8 inches wide, so it easily fits into the palm of your hand or your pocket. It's pleasant to hold, and it looks modern and hip. One of my favorite features is Renew's battery life. The battery lasts for up to nine hours of continuous usage. Standby is 18 days.

Unlike most cell phones, it also comes with a headset that you can use to listen to music or to answer calls—important if you live in one of the states that mandates hands-free driving. The Renew also has a very good speakerphone feature, with wide volume range. And even though the phone is so basic, it has a memory card slot and a USB port for accessing photos and music.

Business Week, New York, 12 fev. 2009, Technology, online. Disponível em <www.businessweek.com>. Acesso em: 13 fev. 2009.