

Lightening Your Digital Load

BY STEVE LARSEN

LET ME HEAD off the letters-to-the-editor right at the start: If the idea of taking a laptop computer on a multi-day motorcycle trip offends your sense of what motor-touring is all about, feel free to stop reading now. However, if you've ever managed to squeeze in an extra day or two of riding because you were more connected to your office, then read on.

My notebook computer is small, but it's a hassle on longer motorcycle trips, especially overseas. Although I've wished I could leave it at home, no hand-held device would have worked—until now. Recently the Treo 650 from palmOne came along and moved the bar to the point that I've left my notebook at home on several trips.

This 6.3 oz device provides nearly all of the functions for which I'd previously carried my notebook computer: The ability to stay current with e-mail—reading and responding; viewing my calendar; making and changing entries; receiving and reviewing various documents; and having access to all of my contacts, with their associated phone numbers and e-mail addresses, and access to the Internet. The one computer-centric activity it lacks is the ability to pull large numbers of hires digital photos from my camera, review them and file them for later editing. For this, I still need a computer. However, as one (or more) GB Compact Flash cards become more affordable, soon I'll be able to shoot away and save my editing until I get home.

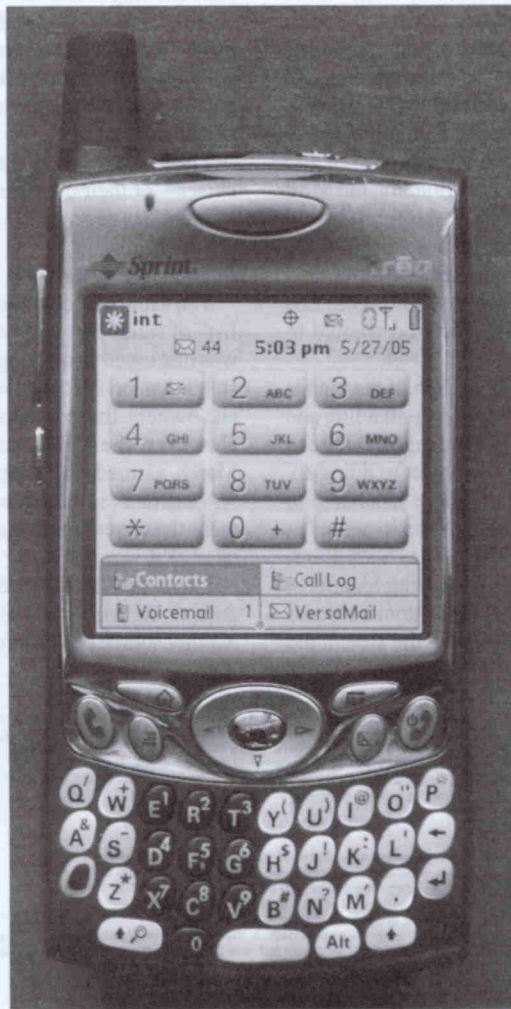
Description

A bright and sharp screen makes it easy to see calendar entries, contacts and read e-mail. A tiny LED at the top glows green when plugged in and fully charged, blinks green when not plugged in and charged and blinks orange when plugged in and charging. Directly under the screen is a 4-way directional pad with a middle "enter" key, and short-cut keys for Phone, E-mail, Calendar and send and end buttons.

At the bottom is a miniature keyboard, although it could be more accurately called a "thumbboard." Nearly all of the keys you need are laid out in the standard QWERTY keyboard format. Two shift options allow you to include capitals, dashes and other standard symbols, and a back-light under the keys makes it easy to read in dim light. The keys feel responsive when pressed and I can use one or two thumbs to type. While sufficient for one or two sentence e-mail responses and

entering calendar entries, it is not much use beyond that.

As for earlier Palm devices, a small fold out external keyboard is available (\$69) from the palmOne website (www.palmone.com), and works wirelessly.



The Treo 650 weighs just 6.3 oz. and has a touch sensitive screen for easy dialing and menu buttons. Note the cellular signal strength and remaining battery life on the top right of the screen.

On the unit's left are volume buttons, as well as a programmable button for starting other applications when held down. The top has an infrared port and a switch for silencing the device—very handy. Also on the top is the hole for the stylus and a Secure Digital slot for adding extra memory, a requirement if you use its camera mode, download games or get a lot of e-mail.

A small camera lens and speaker are on the back, along with access to the battery. The small chrome button next to the camera lens turns out to be a mirror to assist you when taking the inevitable self portraits. On the bottom are the power/charge/sync multi-connector and a 2.5 mm stereo headphone jack.

As a Phone

Any device like this must be a decent, fully functional phone first. My version of this phone uses Sprint and works in digital or analog modes (800/1900 MHz CDMA radio with 1xRTT support). The 650 is also available from Cingular. Other carriers will have it soon, no doubt. A special unlocked GSM version of the phone is available from the palmOne website. This allows you to put any SIM card into the phone and use it even if you are in another country.

The phone application features 70 quick launch short cuts or speed dial buttons. Additionally, there are buttons for speakerphone, hold, and multi-way calling. Sadly, voice dialing is not included, as in many cheaper phones. However, Sprint offers a rarely advertised but powerful centrally hosted voice recognition system. This allows for voice dialing of your entire contact database, should you desire, for an extra \$4 per month. The voice recognition capability with this feature is nothing short of astounding.

Connecting

New on the Treo 650 is Bluetooth support, but I have yet to play with this feature and my headset is the standard wired variety. Some new high-end motorcycle helmets coming from Europe are including Bluetooth connectivity, and I plan to test them with this device. Bluetooth is the short range wireless technology enabling commu-

nication with wireless headsets and support for HotSync functions which allow you to keep the device up-to-date with your desktop or notebook computer. The Treo 650 has no Wi-Fi connectivity.

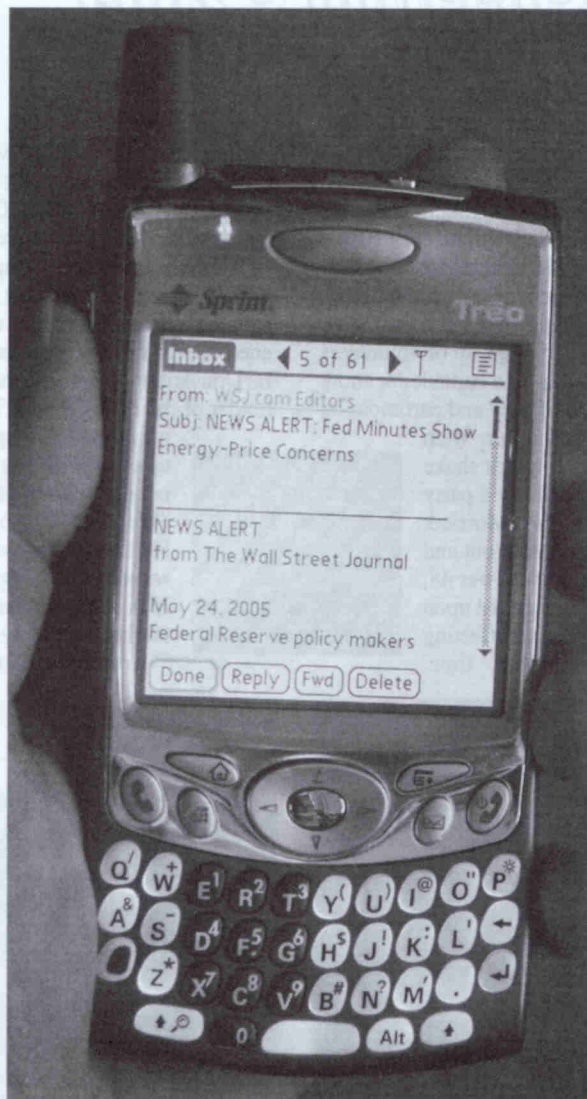
If you are a corporate user, the mail program (VersaMail) supports Microsoft Exchange ActiveSync, making it much easier to set up. It also means that any changes made by your assistant to your calendar, for instance, automatically appear on your handheld and vice versa. It also supports POP3 and IMAP4 mail protocols. Setup and use of these may require a bit of help or time with the manual, but it does work well once running.

Specifications

On the inside, the Treo 650 uses the power-saving PXA270 processor from Intel. It offers 23 MB of user-accessible storage in Flash ROM, which means data is not lost when the device loses power and saves power when it's running. It has a removable Lithium Ion battery rated at 5 hours talk time or 14 days standby.

Software

The Treo 650 runs the Palm OS for contacts and calendar, VersaMail for e-mail and RealPlayer in ROM for audio playback. It also has a picture and video player and uses the Blazer web browser. The applications have all been optimized for the directional pad. Using the keyboard and touch screen are almost unnecessary for the built-in programs—many of which are fast and intuitively easy to learn. Auto-shift and auto-number shift also work



Access e-mail and web sites from the Treo. Its QWERTY thumbboard is just like your keyboard at home but does not lend itself to long e-mail replies. The volume and programmable button are on the left.

automatically throughout all applications. And the launch screen contains a detailed battery and signal-strength meter.

The unit includes Camera, Camcorder, and Pictures applications. Granted, the .3 megapixel camera is low resolution, but the pictures are not bad and the convenience for quick shots is hard to beat. It also takes amazingly good photos in very low light without a flash. You can move the images and videos to your desktop when you sync. The pictures are in JPG format and the movies in MPEG4.

Cost

At the time of this writing, the Treo 650, through Sprint, lists for \$599.99 with subscription, but routinely goes on sale and I found it for \$319.99. It is also available through Cingular. An unlocked GSM version is \$699 from the palmOne website.

All new technologies extract a heavy price in cost and complexity for those who adopt things early, and this is true here as well. However, for the touring rider, the Treo 650 may eliminate 3 other devices; your phone, a PDA such as the Palm and your Blackberry or other e-mail pager. With the promise of also eliminating your computer, it has begun to go mainstream.

Palm One—800-881-7256;
www.palmone.com/us/. Also call
or visit your local Sprint or
Cingular retail location.

A SAMPLING OF TREO 650 ACCESSORIES

Wireless Keyboard

Full-size infrared QWERTY keyboard. Folds small enough for a pocket, works for taking notes or sending e-mails and overcomes the limitations of the built-in "thumbboard." Weighs 7.4 oz. \$69.99.

Treo Side Case

Side-loading leather case includes a belt clip. I like it because the horizontal loading makes it fast and easy to get to the Treo. I use the clip to attach it to the webbing on my bike. \$29.99.

Wireless Headset

Built-in Bluetooth allows hands and cord-free conversations up to 30 feet from the phone. Lightweight, fits over your ear and includes a travel charger. The button lets you answer or end calls with just a touch. \$79.99.

Solitaire Collection

With its excellent graphics, a game or two is fun. This solitaire collection contains the popular Klondike, Free Cell, Pyramid, Carpet, Spider, Yukon and a couple hundred more. \$17.95.

12-Volt Charger

Handy for the bike, this allows you to recharge using your bike's power. Two-foot coiled cord and six-foot extender. \$29.99.

256 MB Expansion Card

A major complaint from early Treo 650 users was inadequate memory. Palm offers this 256 MB MultiMediaCard SD expansion card. Buy a generic for half this price from your local computer dealer. \$49.99~\$24.99.