

Innostream i188

Simon Rockman looks at a Korean phone that may well turn up here before too long. It has a great 65K colour screen, the same as the Panasonic GD87 featured on this month's cover, and some seriously good games. Bring it on, he tells the UK networks



The Innostream i188 is one of a growing number of phones from Chinese and Far Eastern manufacturers which are starting to appear in the UK as lower cost alternatives to the well-known brands. Innostream is hoping it will be in the UK shops by Christmas, but as yet we have no definite info on pricing or availability.

It's a bit special: tiny, with a stunning colour screen and some special gaming features. At 43x80x20mm and 80g it's small and light. Physically similar to a Motorola v66, it's more like a Samsung T100 inside. It has a 64x80 pixel screen on the lid and a stunning 65,500 colour, 128x144 pixel screen on the inside.

The Inno188 is enhanced by an invisible feature that allows you to press two keys at the same time. This doesn't sound that exciting, but it's hugely important for gaming. It means your character can run and jump at the same time. Or in a driving game, you can both accelerate and steer.

Smart devices like the Nokia 9210 and Nokia 7650 have had this for a while. The i188 has it because it uses software called WGE or Wireless Games Engine. This means programmers can do things like converting Gameboy software for mobiles.

It has 40-channel polyphonic sound, but no GPRS, MMS, email, Bluetooth or swappable covers. It does have WAP, but WAP without GPRS is so last year.

The icons are beautiful, thanks to the colour screen and good animation. There's a distinct American feel, for instance the Snoopy-style mailbox for text messages. When you select an icon from the front screen the next screen is

also icon based, not a list like the Sony Ericsson T68i. The phone makes the most of the screen, with some great animated wallpapers and screen savers.

It's easy enough to add numbers to the phone book from incoming calls. The user interface is more like a PC than other mobile phones, with tabs across the top, tool tips and overlapping windows. The Nokia 7650 does a bit of this, but in general it doesn't work well on a mobile, and particularly on one with a screen that is 128x144. That might be big for a phone but it is too small for a PC interface.

In the phone book you have to scroll to see all the tabs. You can have up to 500 names with four numbers for each. These include home, mobile and office. There are nine caller groups, six of which should be configurable, but there did not seem to be an option to do so on this prototype. There is an option to attach a ring tone and a picture to a group, and with the second display on the lid you do get good caller line identification.

Call profiles

There are call profiles but you can't select these if the phone is in silent mode. The ring tone options are good. It has 44 different ring tones, with spaces for more composed ones. The phone doesn't allow you to change the volume in a quiet place without actually playing the sound, but you can avoid embarrassment by holding in the side button to select silent mode.

Some of the ringers have got sampled speech in them, including



actual size

phonepreview

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BATTERY USABILITY PERFORMANCE FEATURES



VERDICT

With polyphonic sound, a 128x144, 65,535 colour screen and multi-press keys this is a great gaming phone, even though the small keypad makes finding the keys a little tricky. Very small and cute to hold, it looks great with a vivid blue backlit keypad. Whilst the Innostream i188 is very advanced in some respects, it's backwards in others. There's no GPRS, MMS, email, Bluetooth or exchangeable covers. A phone for those into aesthetics, the screen, size and external screen out-Samsung Samsung for cool.

Review date November 02
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SPECIFICATION

Stats	Price	TBA
	Size	43x80x20mm 80g
	Talktime/standby	3.5hrs/100hrs
	Frequencies used	900/1800MHz
	SAR rating	TBA
Basics	Built-in phonebook	500 spaces
	Vibrate alert	Yes
	Games	Excellent
	Alarm clock	Yes
	Swappable fascias	No
Ringtones	Downloadable ringtones/graphics	Yes/Yes
	Voice dial	No
	Predictive text input	Yes, T9
	Polyphonic ringtones	Yes
	Recordable ringtones	No
Data	Ringtone composer	Yes
	Spaces for extra rings	TBA
	Link ringtones to callers	Yes, via groups
	WAP	Yes, 1.2.1
	Boosted data	No
Extras	Bluetooth	No
	Infra red modem	No
	Messaging	SMS
	Java for downloadable games etc.	No (see other)
	Colour screen	Yes, 65,535 colours
Other	Camera	No
	Music	No
	Voice recorder	No
	Loudspeaker	No
Wireless games engine, multi-press keys		

someone shouting. It has MIDI support.

The phone is small, and you'll need dextrous fingers—it's difficult to dial single handed. There are a lot of controls: a four way cursor key with a central key labelled WAP (which actually does a lot more); send and end buttons (send to the left and end to the right, Nokia style) and two function keys. Sometimes, particularly in the overlapping windows, it is not clear what the function keys do, with odd double negatives, so if you have a screen that says 'quit', the option key that says 'quit' means quit from quitting, that is to say resume.

You can send long text messages, up to 1064 characters. The phone has T9 predictive text. Innostream is a Korean company and the prototype offers a good selection of Chinese character input methods but none of the refinements we've come to expect, like the ability to add words to the dictionary or insert the odd word it doesn't know.

When you send a text message you get a neat animation of a letter being posted in an American post box. There is no group messaging but you can choose to keep the message and send it again to someone else.

The specifications include a modem speed of 14.4Kbps but there is no infrared or Bluetooth. It's very unlikely you'd be able to find a cable to link to a PC.

This isn't a work or rest phone. It's for play. The games on the i188 are good, they have all the eye-candy of something you'd see on a Colour Gameboy as the phone has a 65K colour screen, but the other thing they have right is the game design. The games are a mixture. There are four programs on this prototype phone although these are not necessarily

what will be made commercially available. They play well and look great but are hampered by the small size of the screen and keypad.

Perhaps the ease of conversion is a bit misleading and for a game to have that special quality (what makes a game is difficult to define, a bit like what makes a joke funny) the game needs to be written with the hardware in mind. All the games on the phone look great. Some of the fonts need some work but if you are into 1980s arcade games it's spot on.

Polyphonic torture

The big downside to all the games is the physical size of the phone and that the buttons are still positioned as a phone. It needs the joypad and the fire buttons positioned next to each other and below the screen. The polyphonic sound really adds to the enjoyment—almost as much as it adds to the annoyance of other passengers on the bus.

There are a lot of pluses with this phone; it's a super small colour model, one of the first with a 65K colour screen—there will be more by Christmas—and multi-press keys. With a following wind this should be enough to persuade either a big retail chain or one of the networks to stock it. It's unlikely to be Vodafone or Orange which have strict handset buying policies and will insist on GPRS and probably MMS. One look at how well the Samsung T100 has done should persuade them of the error of this.

Until Innostream does a deal we won't know about availability or price. You will be able to buy one without a contract from the Far East and some of those will pop up in the UK, but you can expect them to be expensive.

It's in the game



(From left, clockwise) A game where you have to pick up stars and avoid boulders in a maze, sort of Pacman-like; a Super Mario sideways scrolling game; a rather good plan view driving game, which demonstrates the multi-press keys well, with lurid power slides if you accelerate and turn; a great scrolling shoot-em-up space game, although it only has one level.