



Nokia E61 Review by Bwana McCall
(bwana@bwana.org | <http://www.bwana.org>)

As a previous Palm Treo 650 owner, I've had some bad experiences with so-called "smart phones". The device was plagued with serious bugs such as reboots in the middle of calls, constant lock-ups, and poor call quality. I had my doubts that these devices were smart in any way. Eventually, I became the owner of a "Crackberry" and the began to slowly understand their appeal. I found myself hoping that I had email to reply to. I would purposely start conversational threads so that I could type with my happy thumbs. This activity deterred my mind from the fact that call quality on the Blackberry was less than stellar. The Blackberry operating system was also sub-par on several levels and seemed to lack the same third party support I saw with Palm devices. Ah yes, those were the good old days. It's now 2006, and "smart phones" have apparently graduated high school and made their way to a higher level of learning. The new Palm Treos sport Windows Mobile and Palm OS, while the Blackberry has seen form factor changes and OS upgrades. The amount of Windows mobile devices has increased and so has the power of the hardware that runs them. The marriage of PDA and cell phone is well past the honeymoon and have sent their kids to junior high.

Enter Nokia.

Nokia? Don't they make those candy-bar style phones that have bland looks, beeping ring tones, and superb call quality? Oh, I'm sorry, this isn't 1994 anymore, we're in 2006. American perception of Nokia cell phones is not far from what I mocked. Why? America is trapped in a cell phone time vortex. While the rest of the world has sexy devices that do everything including buy snacks from vending machines, Americans rejoice when their phones have Bluetooth AND Wi-Fi capability. Oh joy!!!

Sigh.

It's a sad situation here in America, but thankfully we have the ability to purchase "unlocked" phones from eBay and use them with GSM carriers such as Cingular and T-Mobile. This is what I've done. I've spent a few greenbacks on a brand spanking new [Nokia E61](#) smartphone and I'm gonna tell you what I think about it.

First some specifications so that you understand why I bought this thing.

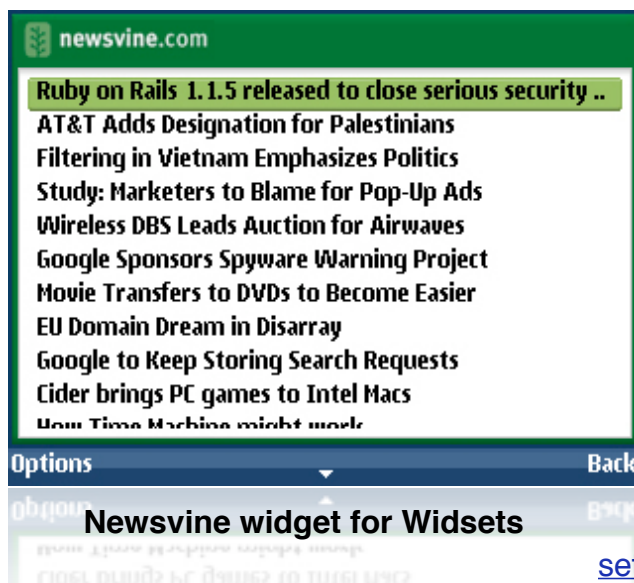
- The Nokia E61 has a "block" form factor similar to the RIM Blackberry.



Nokia E61 Phone

- It sports a QWERTY keyboard design and has Bluetooth and Wi-Fi capability.
- It has a speakerphone for those long conference calls and supports many push email vendors such as Blackberry Enterprise Server (with Good Link), Lotus Notes, and Microsoft Exchange.
- It runs the S60 series Symbian OS 3rd edition and has 75MB of built-in shared memory.
- It's rated at 7 hours of talk time and 264 hours (11 days) of standby battery time.

There are a million other things it does, but these are the highlights of its strong points.



Impressed? Well you should be. This swiss army knife of phones is one of the first to have this kind of flexibility.

As a newcomer to [Symbian](#) OS, I may sound a bit late on a lot of my points. What can I say, I love this operating system. It just feels right, you know? Given that it's been on cell phones before Palm OS and Windows Mobile, it sort of makes sense that using it feels natural. Symbian offers a wide array of applications and options. Some examples of Symbian software that I've fell in love with are, [Putty for Symbian](#) (that's right, the SSH client), [Opera Mobile](#), and [Widsets](#) (a powerful widget engine). I've had the

phone for only a week, so I apologize if I don't list your favorite Symbian application. Did I mention that it's possible to run Ruby on Symbian? Yeah, ridiculously cool. Enough of my drooling over Symbian, let's get into what I like about the Nokia E61.

Form Factor

This phone feels real good in the palm of your hand. It may seem too wide to some, but for me, it's a great fit. It has a sturdy feel with some great materials that reduce the fear of dropping it. Typing with one hand on the awesome keyboard has become second nature to me in only a matter of days.

Look and Feel

In my opinion, the only phone that looks better is the Motorola Q. This phone is dead sexy. It has a great thickness due to the lack of camera (which I don't mind) and is not heavy to carry. The buttons don't feel like you're going to break them if you use them the way buttons should be used. The jog dial takes some getting used to, but the learning curve is not steep at all.

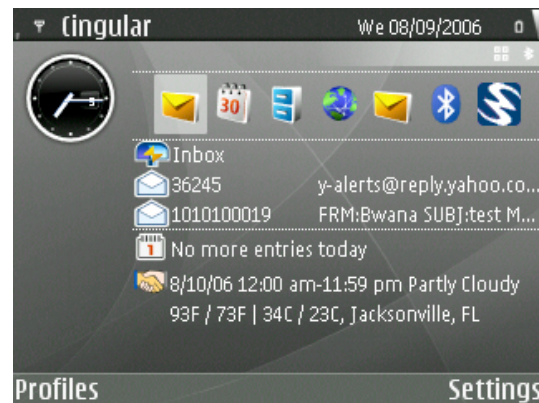
Excellent Sound Quality

This is a Nokia phone, so excellent radio quality is a given. The Nokia E61 is no exception to Nokia's stellar reputation in this area. A surprising quality is the E61's speakerphone. The clarity and volume of this speakerphone has set the bar for all phones claiming to have one. As far as I'm concerned, this is the first real speakerphone for a cellphone.

OMG I <3 Symbian OS

I've said it once, but I must re-iterate it here: Symbian OS is the best operating systems for phones, hands down. I don't know what took me so long to use this updated version of Symbian, but I'm a true believer as of now.

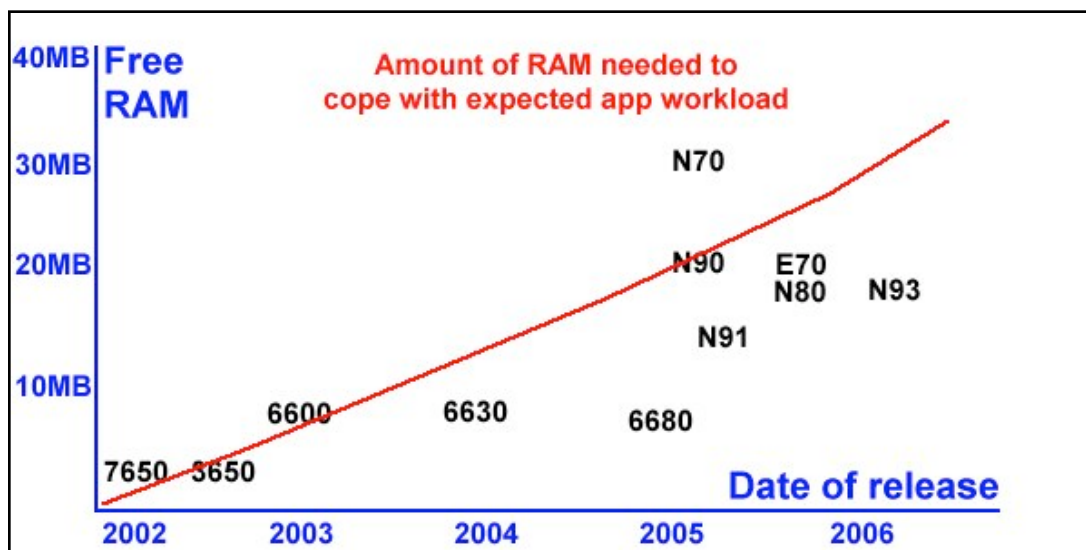
Now that I've gloated and drooled all over my desk regarding the positive aspects of this phone, let me now get into some of the areas I think the Nokia E61 can improve.



Symbian Standby Screen

Symbian OS S60 3rd Edition RAM issues

While I sing the praises about Symbian OS, it is not short of it's problems. Currently, there is a [fairly serious issue](#) surrounding RAM usage with the latest S60 devices. It is quite easy to run out of memory on these devices. Simply having the web browser, contacts, calendar, and messaging open will consume your entire system memory. Not good. Check out this chart borrowed from [allaboutsymbian.com](#):



Amazing isn't it? By the looks of things, this behavior is only getting worse. It needs to be addressed yesterday. I'm a power user and I can see myself running into this quite often if I'm not careful.

Lack of Camera

The E61 doesn't have a built in camera. Some say this is highly unacceptable in this day and age. Others rejoice since a many businesses are not allowing camera phones on the premises. Personally, I believe all camera phones are seriously lacking in the quality department. Not including a camera in the E61 did not prevent me from buying the phone. I look at it as a novelty feature that I would likely use once every blue moon. The fact remains that there are others who live and die by the camera phone, and may determine this is a serious flaw.

Lack of SyncML support

This may not necessarily be a fault of the Nokia E61, but it is definitely a current frustration of mine. [SyncML](#) is a standard used to enable phones to synchronize with many types of services. The Nokia E61 supports the SyncML standard and uses it for most of its day to day synchronization. The issue is with everyone else. Where is support for this phone? Yahoo currently has the more attractive solution with their [Yahoo Next Mobile services](#). One has the ability the sync your contacts and calendars "Over The Air" (OTA) using SyncML. **Yahoo is currently not supporting SyncML with the Nokia E61 and is filtering phone types at the server!** This is beyond frustrating as it would be a perfect solution for remote calendar and contact manipulation. I suppose more support will come over time, but the frustration remains.

Conclusion

Even with RAM issues and OTA sync limitations, the Nokia E61 is a solid, flexible smartphone that carries Nokia's quality seal on it. Utilizing Symbian OS in the smartphone makes it an attractive solution to those who thought about getting a Blackberry but was turned off by the lack of third party support. I am completely sold on this phone and will recommend it to anyone in the market for a smartphone.