

Rovio Mobile Webcam Review

By Sean Carroll / November 4, 2008 / Uncategorized / Toys / 14 Comments

I have a dog at home and I have a mounted webcam to check in on him. This system works fairly well but occasionally he isn't on the couch in the living room and it is at times like that, that I've wished for a camera that I could pan and tilt. I was really excited when I heard about [Rovio](#), I thought it would be the perfect solution! Forget pan and tilt, I could actually go find my dog and check in on him where ever he might be.



Here is the Rovio that I received on Friday night.



I was pretty surprised to get a note just inside the box telling me not to use the included software and instead download the newest version from their website. Instead of a note, why not include a new CD?



Package Contents

Rovio
Docking Station
Mast

Power cable

Battery

Standard USB cable

Rovio Install CD

Rovio quick start guide

Rovio Owner's manual



The docking station. The Cone shaped object on the right side is the TrueTrack beacon. It projects 2 points of light up at the ceiling which the Rovio uses to orient itself. The light is only visible when you touch the cone so you can aim them.



The mast (it just clips onto the dock).



The battery.



The Rovio.



Docking station with mast attached.



Battery compartment. The 2 silver squares are charging contacts.



I had a problem getting the battery installed. I was following the quickstart guide, it had one line about installing the battery and no picture, it said "Install battery." I spent a couple of minutes trying to get a roundish peg into a square hole, with little success. I finally looked at the owners manual and it had a nice picture showing how the battery is supposed to go in.



This is the only position the battery will fit in the compartment.

After getting the basic setup done, everything went downhill from there. After downloading and installing the software, on the first attempt to run the software it notified me that there was an update. Strange, I just installed the newest software, so just in case I told it to go ahead and install the update it found. After downloading and installing the update I ran the software again, and it notified me that there was an update. Ok, so this time I tell it not to do the update and tried to continue, but no matter what I did the setup software wouldn't see the Rovio. Vista would only see a drive and it kept asking me if I wanted to format it.

Stymied in my attempts to setup the Rovio via USB I had to use the only other method available, manually by ADHOC wireless network. This involved looking for wireless networks, picking the network called ROVIO_WOWWEE, then manually setting the IP address and gateway on my wireless network card, after that I was able to get to the Rovio and join it to my own network, only to be completely disappointed.

The huge problems:

Once docked it doesn't charge even though it says it is charging. It shows 100% charge when docked regardless of how much it is charged. When the Rovio tried

to auto dock because of a low charge it dies before it gets home, even if it starts 1 foot away.

The web interface from Pocket IE is broken. Instead of video and the ability to control the Rovio, you get a still picture and you can't control the Rovio at all. Sometimes the Rovio just stops responding, black video, no control, until rebooted.

The minor annoyances:

The Blue LEDs built into the top are not user controllable at all. So long as the Rovio is on, they are on.

The camera doesn't work well in low light conditions, the headlight is useless to help for this. Can only connect to WEP networks (WPA is supposed to be added in a firmware update).

It is possible that all the problems I encountered could be fixed by an updated firmware. My Rovio arrived with firmware 3.97, which I upgraded it to 4.02. Since returning the Rovio Wowwee has released 4.09beta. Whether that would have fixed my Rovio, I'll never know, and it was not something I was ready to risk my money on. For something that I paid 280 bucks for, even though it is a first generation product, I expect a certain level of operation, the Rovio failed completely. Charging itself, which for a remote viewing robot I would argue is its most critical function, did not work.

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Product Information

Price:	299.99
Manufacturer:	WowWee
Pros:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Fully mobile webcam with telepresence. (I did not try to do any telepresence)

Cons:

- Expensive
- Once docked it doesn't charge even though it says it is charging
- It shows 100% charge when docked regardless of how much it is charged
- Dies on its way to autodock when it gets to a low charge
- Highest camera angle points at the ceiling
- The camera doesn't work well in low light conditions
- Headlight is useless
- Can only take pictures at user request
- The web interface from Pocket IE is broken. Instead of video and the
- ability to control the Rovio, you get a still picture and you can't
- control the Rovio at all
- Sometimes the Rovio just stops responding, black video, no control,
- until rebooted
- Can only connect to WEP networks (WPA is supposed to be added in a
- firmware update)

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About The Author



Sean Carroll

14 thoughts on "Rovio Mobile Webcam Review"

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ROBOTFROG

NOVEMBER 4, 2008 AT 2:14 PM

Is this the complete review? No sample photos from the unit, no configuring via wifi?
This is pretty poor for a gadgeteer review.

[Edited at November 05, 2008 14:29:33 PM.]

[Reply](#)



SEAN CARROLL

NOVEMBER 5, 2008 AT 9:23 AM

Sorry that I didn't get any pictures from the webcam. I spent so much time trying to get it to work that taking pictures fell by the wayside, and eventually I realized it was

going back so there wasn't much point in spending anymore time with it.

I'm not sure what you're asking about when you say "no configuring via wifi," because I do mention configuring via wifi. In fact if I hadn't been able to configure it by wifi I wouldn't have been able to use it at all.

[Reply](#)



JAKE TONGUE

NOVEMBER 5, 2008 AT 11:25 AM

wow that seems like quite a bad product

[Reply](#)



ROBOTFROG

NOVEMBER 5, 2008 AT 2:34 PM

I'm just surprised, as there are dozens of other reviews on the internet that were able to easily get the unit to work, even installing the battery, and testing it out. Besides for a handful of unboxing pictures, this just isn't a review of the unit. No review of control by laptop, no discussion of its navigation capabilities, etc. Sorry, but based on other discussions of this unit, I'm disappointed more with the review than the unit.

[Reply](#)



NORCALJEFF

NOVEMBER 6, 2008 AT 2:26 PM

Seems like a great idea with some poor execution.
I think they needed a bit more R&D before they released it.
Too bad, I'd love to have the capability!

[Reply](#)



MT

NOVEMBER 13, 2008 AT 5:37 AM

Sean, Julie:

How about hacking an iRobot Roomba Vacuum Cleaner into a mobile webcam? Keep an eye on the dog and clean up at the same time... actually this was intended as a joke but on second thought..... 😊

[Reply](#)



FROSTFIRE GIFTS

DECEMBER 15, 2008 AT 2:04 PM

not enough research seems to have gone into this product

[Reply](#)



JOHN NICKERSON

JANUARY 2, 2009 AT 4:38 PM

I'm a software developer not a network person – so my first few days with ROVIO were frustrating to say the least. But I finally found the “ureka moment” and it is just too cool – with too many creative possibilities.

I have yet to access from outside my home network, but I am sure I will get that nailed soon. Actually, in March – Robodance is supposed to come out with an app that makes this connection idiot proof (me) as well as allow control with a Wiimote.

I basically wanted the unit to be able to check on the ole homestead while I'm away – like an Iphone connect etc. Gotta make sure that the house sitter has "Mr. Toogey" supplied with plenty of kibbles.

Wowee seems to be doing a good job of getting the firmware "up-to-speed".

I'm just an old guy that recently retired from 31 years in the tech business – but for what it is worth – I think it is a cool product with many potential uses. (But I also remember when PONG was a "cutting edge" video game and lava lights were high tech). Actually my college years in the 70's are a bit foggy. Go figure!

jn

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STEVE

JANUARY 5, 2009 AT 9:55 PM

I just took my Rovio out of the box, charged it up and then ran the software in Vista – it bombed out at the wizard's opening screen. This was the latest setup direct from their support site. I'll try it tomorrow in AdHoc mode from a laptop with WiFi. So far I am not impressed – sigh...

[Reply](#)



MAKOKIDD

FEBRUARY 20, 2009 AT 7:59 PM

I bought one of these on Sunday (President's Day weekend) and charged it overnight. I too had my share of difficulties getting it set up. I tried updating the firmware to the supposedly "stable" beta version 5.0 but could not get WPA or WPA2 to work on my network. I ended up restoring it to factory firmware v3.97 and using WEP. I "trained" it to find its home base and got to play with it for about 5 or 10 minutes before the battery died. After several cycles of charging and attempting to use it, I ended up boxing it back up and returning it. IMHO this product is not ready for prime time. I'll wait until they have a solid Lithium Ion battery solution and more years of experience under their belts (if they can survive that long).

Very disappointed, wasted my holiday day off.

Mako Kidd
Honolulu, HI

[Reply](#)



MATHIEU

SEPTEMBER 1, 2009 AT 5:21 PM

Well,

To me this Rovio is a bit hard to setup for a rookie in networking but with motivation and thorough forum research it works pretty well.

For the price, merely a third more than a regular IP network cam, it is really working well 😊

Battery problems can be solved with a good RC charger and doing a few battery cycling tweaking.

The overall grade would be a B then, to get such a product you need to be a kind of early adopter !

cheers,

Mathieu

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OLD NOVICE

APRIL 2, 2010 AT 7:32 PM

Despite the warnings in the previous posts, there were enough positive reviews elsewhere on the web that I decided to indulge myself. I had no problems with configuring via the USB cable; after a couple of update cycles it was quite easy. However, the battery problem is unacceptable. After a dozen charge cycles it will only last 3 minutes or less. If they can send me a working replacement battery, I'm sure this will be a fun toy. If not, it is going back.

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EACRAIG

MAY 24, 2010 AT 4:33 AM

WOW... Wish I had seen these reports before purchasing the REVIO. I have a fair amount of technical background but would be using this with a Macintosh system. I purchased about three months ago but have not opened the box yet. I cannot see how a company could get this far, including the really nice retail box with having only a 3-5 minutes of operation. Even 3-5 hours would seem short for me. I also wanted it for times when I am away from my home. I think the box will stay sealed and I will be looking for more information. This news is very disappointing. Reason: finding something with its advertised capabilities while working with a Macintosh!

[Reply](#)



FRANCOIS FASBENDER

JANUARY 3, 2011 AT 7:23 AM

if you want high quality for a such device, you must paid at least 600 USD. You cannot get acceptable mix between wifi, networking, image and RC stuffs for only 200 usd....

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