

Nothing Phone 2a review: a standout budget Android

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London-based tech firm Nothing's latest Android attempts to shake up the budget phone market with something a little more interesting. Costing from £319 (€329/A\$529) the Phone 2a aims to take the cool design and intrigue that made its higher-end models stand out and package it up into something cheaper but still novel, sits alongside the full-fat Phone 2 costing £579. The new model sticks with Nothing's cool, semi see-through design. It has a big, smooth and bright OLED screen on the front with a semi-transparent back allowing you to see its interesting design elements, including the "glyph" LEDs that Nothing has made its trademark. This time the phone is made of plastic, rather than the metal and glass of the Phone 2, and the LEDs are only in the top section of the phone around the central camera module. But they can still perform complex patterns for ringtones and notifications, show the volume, charge percentage, timers and other fun things, such as a music visualiser. The phone feels smooth and well made, but the back plastic attracts dust like a magnet and picks up scratches fairly easily. Specifications Screen: 6.7in 120Hz FHD+ OLED (394ppi) Processor: MediaTek Dimensity 7200 Pro RAM: 8 or 12GB Storage: 128 or 256GB Operating system: Nothing OS 2.5 (Android 14) Camera: 50MP main and ultrawide, 32MP selfie Connectivity: 5G, eSIM, wifi 6, NFC, Bluetooth 5.3 and GNSS Water resistance: IP54 (splash resistant) Dimensions: 162 x 76.3 x 8.9mm Weight: 190g Mid-range power with long battery life Inside the Phone 2a has a mid-range MediaTek Dimensity 7200 Pro chip, which performs pretty well for the price. The software feels snappy and smooth, apps load quickly and games run well. It can't match the performance of a high-end phone and gets pretty hot when gaming, but handles most tasks with aplomb. The Nothing has solid battery life too. The phone lasted a good 52 hours or two days between charges with general use, including several hours spent on 5G a day. Gaming dents the battery more than high-end rivals, consuming about 18% an hour playing Diablo Immortal for instance. Sustainability Nothing says the battery maintains at least 90% of its original capacity for at least 1,000 full charge cycles. The Phone 2a is generally repairable in the UK. Screen replacements cost £70 or batteries cost £36 plus about £35 labour and shipping by Nothing. The device is made of recycled aluminium, copper, plastic, steel, tin and other materials accounting for 20% of the phone's weight. It has a carbon footprint of 52kg CO2 equivalent. The company publishes sustainability reports and runs a trade-in scheme. Nothing OS 2.5 The phone runs Nothing OS 2.5, which is based on Android 14 matching the firm's other phones. The software offers a clutter-free experience but with an interesting visual design based around dot-matrix art, widgets and icons. It can be styled to look just like regular Android, but it encourages you to fill your home screen with monochrome icons, big folders and widgets for a much more interesting experience. Like the fun glyph lights on the back, none of these customisations bog the phone down or get in the way of day-to-day tasks. Unfortunately Nothing comes up short on software support, only offering three years of software updates and four years of bimonthly security updates. When the best in the business now offer at least seven

years, four years just isn't good enough for your wallet or the planet, even in the budget market. Camera The Phone 2a has two 50-megapixel cameras on the back and a 32MP selfie camera that perform very similarly to the more expensive Phone 2. The main camera general takes good photos handling high-contrast scenes well. But it has a tendency to over-sharpen fine detail in bright light while struggling to preserve detail in middling to dim light. The ultrawide camera produces decent shots too, but images look soft when viewed at full size. The phone has no telephoto camera with images captured beyond 2x digital zoom being poor. Still, the camera is decent for the money, though soundly beaten by Google's Pixel 6A or 7A, which can often be found around this price. Price The Nothing Phone 2a costs from £319 (€329/A\$529). For comparison, the Nothing Phone 2 costs £499, the Google Pixel 7a costs £449 and the Samsung Galaxy A54 costs £349. Verdict The Nothing Phone 2a is a solid entry into the budget phone market that manages to stand out from an otherwise often dull crowd with an interesting design and fun software. You get a lot of phone for the money, with a big and crisp display, long battery life, solid performance and a design that doesn't look budget. The plastic body might put some off but it feels solid and well made, and is splash resistant, which isn't guaranteed at this end of the market. The camera is good even if it can't rival Google's budget phones that can be had for only a little more. The worst bit is short software support life, which will render the phone unsafe to use well before its hardware gives out. Pros: interesting design with glyph lights, good screen, decent performance, long battery life, slick Android 14 software, premium look feel at budget price, good fingerprint scanner, splash resistant. Cons: no optical zoom camera, only four years of security updates, camera not best in class, plastic back scratches easily.