

OnePlus 12 review: smartphone left behind by top rivals

Publication Date: 2024-02-23

Author: Samuel Gibbs

Section: Technology

Tags: Smartphones, Android, Mobile phones, reviews

Article URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2024/feb/23/oneplus-12-review-smartphone-left-behind-by-top-rivals-screen-battery-life>



OnePlus's latest top phone can't shake the feeling of being left behind by rivals. Even with a sleek appearance, speedy software and longer battery life the OnePlus 12 is devoid of the much-hyped AI tools packed into handsets from Samsung, Google and others. It feels more like a phone from 2020 than from the new era of artificial intelligence. That could appeal to anyone looking for a cut-down, relatively clutter-free experience – as may the cost of £849 (€969/\$799), which undercuts £1,000 rivals with all the bells and whistles. But with modern standards, it feels lacking. The design is very similar to last year's OnePlus 11 (which was priced £120 less at launch): a slick metal and glass sandwich that feels as smooth as it looks. The huge 6.82in OLED screen is super crisp, smooth and extremely bright. The large circular camera bump on the back is a standout design element alongside the fan-favourite alert slider on the side. Inside the OnePlus has Qualcomm's latest top Snapdragon 8 Gen 3 chip, which is 30% faster and 20% more power efficient than predecessors. It is an extremely powerful chip that is only available in a handful of new phones. The OnePlus certainly feels fast and smooth in normal operations, but to get maximum performance out of it – making it run at full tilt – you have to enable the "high performance" mode buried in the settings or else use it in gaming mode. The phone is therefore geared up for power efficiency over raw performance, which provides a very long battery life. It lasts a solid 52 to 55 hours between charges, with more than nine hours of active screen use with default settings. This is significantly longer than last year's model and up there with the best in the business. The OnePlus charges super quickly too, reaching 100% in under 30 minutes with the included 100W charger. Specifications Screen: 6.82in 120Hz QHD+ OLED (510ppi) Processor: Qualcomm Snapdragon 8 Gen 3 RAM: 12 or 16GB Storage: 256 or 512GB Operating system: OxygenOS 14 (Android 14) Camera: 50M + 48MP ultrawide + 64MP 3x; 32MP selfie Connectivity: 5G, eSIM, wifi 7, NFC, Bluetooth 5.4 and GNSS Water resistance: IP65 (spray resistant) Dimensions: 164.3 x 75.8 x 9.2mm Weight: 220g Sustainability The battery is rated to maintain at least 80% of its original capacity for 1,600 full charge cycles. The phone does not contain meaningful amounts of recycled materials but is generally repairable by OnePlus, with screen replacements costing £174 and batteries £21 plus about £50 for labour. The company participates in the Eco Rating scheme, which evaluates environmental impact, and is included in the parent company Oppo's yearly sustainability reports. OxygenOS 14 The phone runs OxygenOS 14, which is a modified version of the latest Android 14 software. It is generally pretty slick and has a good amount of customisation options covering everything from gestures, the look and feel of the software and various multitasking tools. But it lacks any of the AI tools and smart systems that have become the mainstay of rivals in both Android and iPhone camps. There is no advanced photo editing, no AI wallpaper generator, no

AI summarisation or transcription tools, not even Google's excellent feature Circle to Search. Not all the AI tools on rivals are hits, of course, but many of them have become useful additions you should expect in a top-end phone. The other big miss is short software support. OnePlus will only provide four years of Android updates and five years of security patches, which is at least two years short of the benchmark set by Apple, Google and Samsung, let alone Fairphone's 10 years. OnePlus is part of smartphone giant Oppo, so it can and should be doing better. Camera The OnePlus 12 has a camera that is a small step up from last year's model. On the back is a main 50-megapixel camera capable of producing nice-looking images in a reasonably wide range of lighting, though it does become a bit inconsistent in dim or night scenes. The 64MP 3x telephoto camera is equally solid and can perform an in-sensor zoom to reach 6x magnification with additional digital zoom on top. In good light the 6x zoom is very good, but it quickly becomes muddy in less than bright conditions. Similar can be said about the ultrawide. Overall the camera system is solid, but it struggles more than rivals indoors, in dim light or in high-contrast scenes. OnePlus still has work to do to match Google, Samsung or Apple. Price The OnePlus 12 costs from £849 (€969/\$799). For comparison, the Google Pixel 8 Pro costs £999, the Samsung Galaxy S24+ costs £999 and the iPhone 15 Plus costs £899. Verdict The OnePlus 12 is a solid phone that is caught in no man's land. It has the performance but lacks the features to match its high-end rivals. A complete lack of AI tools is almost retro at this stage and renders it a bit boring. Its software support life falls far short of the bar set by the Google, Samsung or Apples of this world, losing it a star. At the same time, it is also too expensive to be considered a mid-range phone, which would typically cost between £350 to £650. That leaves OnePlus in an awkward spot: it has top performance but fundamentally delivers less than its rivals. Pros: Slick, nice design, long battery life and longevity, 30-minute full charge, top chip, great screen. Cons: Software support too short, no meaningful AI features, camera lags behind rivals, only spray resistant, price increase over predecessors, performance artificially limited outside "high performance" mode.