

Google Nexus 9

By Vincent Chang

Google's latest tablet moves away from the 7-inch screen of its predecessor. This is likely due to the growth of phablets that compete with small tablets.

The new Nexus tablet, built by HTC for Google, sports an 8.9-inch display. But its most significant departure from earlier Nexus slates is the aspect ratio of the screen.

Nexus tablets have always had 16:9 screens. The newcomer's is a 4:3 display with the same (2,048 x 1,536 pixels) resolution as Apple's latest iPad, and better than 16:9 for reading Web pages and e-books. In landscape orientation, it requires less scrolling. The 16:9 aspect ratio works better for videos as it eliminates the black bars above or below the image.

The Nexus 9 has the same design language as previous efforts. Like the Nexus 5 smartphone, it has a soft-touch back that is smooth but not slippery. The back is plastic, while the sides are brushed metal.

It is not as sturdy as the all-metal iPad, as the plastic back can be depressed slightly. But I have always found the iPad too cold to the touch

when idle.

HTC's influence on the Nexus 9 is apparent from its front-facing stereo BoomSound speakers, which are also found in HTC's smartphones. As they are not in the back, like the iPad's are, the sound will not be muffled by your grip.

A new tap-to-wake feature offers an alternative to using the power button. You can wake the Nexus 9 with a double tap on the screen. To my surprise, this useful feature is found only in the Nexus 9, and is not part of the new Android 5.0 Lollipop OS. This OS update introduces a host of changes, from a new design language to a battery-saving mode and a revamped notification shade. Having used Android 5.0 on both a Nexus 5 and now the Nexus 9, I would say there are still some software bugs. At times, the tablet felt sluggish and it occasionally froze, as had the Nexus 5.

The hardware is probably not at fault. After all, the Nexus 9 uses the 64-bit Nvidia Tegra K1 chip. In Geekbench 3, it scored 1,792 (single-core) and 3,125 (multi-core). This is slower than Apple's latest A8x chip (iPad Air 2) but faster than the A7 (iPad Air).



Games ran smoothly and without issues. But mind the apps you download. The tablet has just 32GB of storage and does not support a microSD card.

Battery life topped out at 8hr 20min, about the same as the iPad Air 2. It should last slightly longer if you turn on its power-saving mode.

Unfortunately, HTC informed us that the Nexus 9 will not be available in Singapore. Your best option is probably Amazon, which ships the Wi-Fi models here. In the United States, the Nexus 9 LTE is going for US\$599 (S\$795).

■ *A solid tablet with a powerful processor and good audio.*

vinchang@sph.com.sg

TECH SPECS

Price: US\$599 (S\$795) for the Nexus 9 LTE in the US
 Processor: Nvidia Tegra K1
 RAM: 2GB
 Display: 8.9 inches, 2,048 x 1,536 pixels
 Camera: 8 megapixels (rear), 1.6 megapixels (front)
 Storage: 32GB
 Battery: 6,700 mAh

RATING

Features	1	2	3	4	5
Design	1	2	3	4	5
Performance	1	2	3	4	5
Value for money	1	2	3	4	5
Battery life	1	2	3	4	5
Overall	1	2	3	4	5

Lenco BTS-110 Bluetooth Speaker

By Ebel Tang

Portable Bluetooth speakers in smaller form factors appear to be in vogue these days, with a plethora of these devices in the market now. Dutch audio brand Lenco wants a slice of the pie.

At first glance, you are bound to be impressed by how sleek the cube-like BTS-110 speaker looks, with its glossy plastic exterior, topped with the usual grille-like design on speakers.

Although the glossy exterior is a fingerprint magnet, it does make the BTS-110 stand out. One might even mistake the black version for a product from Razer, the gaming peripherals specialist.

It weighs 253g, heavier than most of its kind. But the weight makes the speaker feel solid, yet it is still light

enough to be carried in one hand.

A small, but important touch is a rubber rim at the base. This ensures that the speaker stays put wherever it is placed.

Operating the speaker is easy. The off/on switch is at the base. Three buttons at the side handle functions such as volume up/down.

A hands-free feature lets me answer calls without having to disconnect the speaker. Pairing it with my phone took only seconds.

Lenco reports a Bluetooth reception range of up to 10m, but testing showed that sound started to break up after 5m. Even after multiple attempts, the problem persisted.

On the flipside, the speaker's battery life was astounding. It lasted



more than six hours, twice the three-hour estimate claimed. You can charge the speaker only via USB, but I wish that the option to do so via a two-pin or three-pin power adaptor was available out of the box.

The speaker's strong bass and mid-range response make up for its weak treble performance. Electronic, dance and hip-hop show off its

TECH SPECS

Price: \$79.90
 Bluetooth reception: Up to 10m
 Output power: 3 Watts

RATING

Design	1	2	3	4	5
Performance	1	2	3	4	5
Value for money	1	2	3	4	5
Overall	1	2	3	4	5

strengths, but classical music and ballads are not its strong suit. Hardwell and Showtek's How We Do sounded great, with the thumping bass line evident throughout.

If you need more power, there is an AUX port function to chain several BTS-110 speakers together, a boon for an outdoor party.

■ *A long battery life, intuitive operation and hands-free operation make the Lenco BTS-110 a good choice. But it might be pricey for some.*

ebeltang@sph.com.sg