

Pics in More Places

By John Fardoulis

Here's a second look at Sony Ericsson's C702i after using it over the last month. For me, it's still a product that best complements my active lifestyle.

There's four distinguishing things about this product - it's a Cyber-shot model (3.2 Mpx), splash and dust resistant, isn't too bulky - plus includes an integrated GPS for geographical services. Such things make it a relatively unique all-in-one package. There are rival stand-alone imaging, GPS and ruggedised products but none with all four elements built in.

Styling & Build

Sony Ericsson's C702i looks good, and comes with a sporty personality. It's still micro phone sized but with splash and dust resistance. A non slip back is provided, offering both visual and practical appeal - adding character and grip.

A two tone colour scheme has been used, either silver and black or silver and aqua (cool cyan in Sony Ericsson speak).

The C702i feels substantial, without unnecessary bulk. As mentioned, it's been designed as a sporty phone, incorporating better seals to help protect it. But it's not indestructible.

Active Lifestyle

Generally speaking, lifestyle should be one of the main elements affecting the design of a phone.

Whether fashion's important (or not), perhaps imaging for young parents in capturing (and sharing), or a basic phone with big fonts for those who don't want fuss. Different strokes for different folks.

With this in mind, Sony Ericsson's C702i is designed to complement active lifestyles. Not just mountain climbers but people who fear damaging their phone through life's little mishaps.

Sony Ericsson uses the following phrases to help explain the essence of their C702i. "Any Angle. Any Weather", "Memories Mapped" and "Photos in more Places".

Buttons

Send and end buttons are a bit small but you get used to them. Building up SMS speed takes practice over a day or two.

Calls & SMS

There's rather loud ringer, which is handy outdoors. Full screen photo CLI adds personality, plus photo thumbnails in the SMS area.

A relatively large screen makes getting around the phone book and text messaging easy. Sony Ericsson has been generous with screen size without making the unit chunky.

Location, Location

Rather than skewed toward being a location aware 'techie' or 'business' product, this unit is a lot more sporty and lifestyle driven. Lifestyle comes first, with technology playing a supporting role.

The C702i has integrated Google Maps for Mobile (and compatibility with Google Earth) better than any other phone we've tried. The GPS interactively tracks where you are on

Google Maps, in either satellite or map views. An approximation is used if the C702i can't see satellites for a precise fix.

It also integrates geography tightly with photos, automatically embedding a position fix in each photo. I found that I started taking more travel photos because of the ability to plot them on maps to show my friends a bird's eye view of where I was.

Voice prompted navigation could be important for some people, with Wayfinder providing street maps and turn-by-turn guidance.

We believe that a three month trial will be provided out of the box, leaving it up to customers to subscribe if they like it. More information regarding will be confirmed by Sony Ericsson at launch.

A tracker application is also included, using distance and speed to work out how many calories are burned during exercise.

Geo What?

In a digital photo, a comprehensive number of variables are embedded in the file. Phones (and some digital cameras) with GPS capabilities can now include a location fix of where the shot was taken.

This information can be shared with external applications such as Google Maps or Google Earth. Google's photo service, Picasa, can automatically plot photos on a map or globe. Over time, more online photo services will integrate mapping plus cool new applications (both mobile and fixed internet), taking location into account. Those interested can have a close look at an example of how much info is embedded in a photo taken with the C702i on page 34.

Camera

Another active lifestyle element (in general) is having a camera with you when exploring new places.

Being splash and dust resistant means broader photo opportunities, with embedded location tagging adding an interesting and fun element on top.

There's an active lens cover which protects optics and provides a quick start when taking photos. The C702i has been designed for one handed operation and comes with Cyber-shot menus, making shooting easy.

A new feature is face detection, adjusting auto focus to sharpen off-centred detail as required.

Embedding precise geographic information in photos opens up a new dimension. This means mapping images, geoblogging and sorting photos by where they were taken.

It didn't seem as though GPS information was embedded in camcorder footage though, perhaps something to add in the next model?

This product also has video calling, with a second camera at the top of the screen. Perhaps being sporty will mean video calls from strange new places?

I've just started to appreciate Sony Ericsson's VideoDJ feature, which allows you to assemble photos, videos, sound and text into mini-film clips to either send over MMS or share via the fixed internet. On page 35 is an example of how motivation is growing through sharing



Actual size



(Above) This phone is an 'action' Cyber-shot product, ruggedised and with extra grip on the bottom but still comes with dedicated imaging elements such as an active lens cover.

experiences via Facebook. That is, snapping a few photos and taking camcorder clips when doing fun stuff, then spending ten minutes assembling as mini-film clips.

Connections

The C702i is a 3.5g product, meaning less lag when accessing online material or faster speed if connected to a laptop as a modem. Loading Google Maps for Mobile also benefits from speed. Customers should be warned to check data usage if not on an attractive data plan though.

We found the pre-production sample pretty power hungry when using the GPS but that's common with pre-production samples in general. Sony Ericsson claim robust battery performance.

This product takes a (M2) Memory Stick Micro card, plus plenty of onboard storage.

Impression

As mentioned last edition, Sony Ericsson's C702i is currently my favourite phone. Reasons are that it's a bit more durable and a GPS helps me bookmark places of interest (like shipwreck locations) and geotag photos when travelling up and down the coast diving on weekends.

Plus being a compact size. Maybe we need a resurgence of micro phones, as some vendors try and cram too much in, making handsets bulky.

I like phones that offer practical advantages and going out on boats a lot, being splash resistant is a bonus not provided by most rivals.



Being location aware is one of the strong points of this product. What's more important however, is making positioning useful. Tightly integrating Google Maps for Mobile, a Sports Tracker and Wayfinder applications transform GPS coordinates into useful visual guides. Above you can see a Google Maps for Mobile view, using the inbuilt GPS to update where you are.



If there's no GPS coverage - say in a building, an approximation using phone towers is made. It tells you how accurate the position fix is. Without GPS we were getting accuracy from 60 to 1700 metres. A shaded circle shows your vicinity.



The sample tested had Wayfinder turn-by-turn navigation installed, and we believe a trial period will be included. Customers can then choose whether or not to subscribe.



Tracker is an application included for monitoring and reviewing exercise activities. Above we're reviewing a one hour bike ride, where the C702i monitored speed, distance and time. It also plots your route.



Even though the C702i has a lot of extras, it's still a cool phone, covering all the everyday elements such as full screen photo CL. We're surprised that every phone doesn't have this.



Here's a photo taken at a boat ramp by the C702i. It could be anywhere really. By location stamping info into the photo, it can be used with Google Maps or Google Earth. Google Maps for Mobile is integrated with the phone's photo gallery - so you can click "view on map" and it shows a thumbnail of where it was taken. It mightn't sound too exciting but in this example, we've gained a bird's eye view of the surrounding area. It also gives an idea regarding the terrain, scenery, suburb and relative location to other places. An answer to the question of "where'd you take that". Visual story telling, using an eye in the sky!

You can choose a satellite or map view when looking at it on your mobile or computer.



The Cyber-shot menu includes a little green GPS icon, telling you a photo's going to be location stamped.



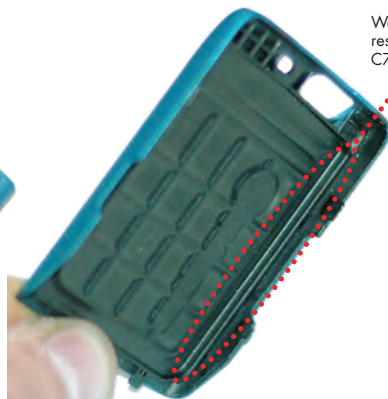
The boat ramp photo is shown here as a thumbnail in Google Earth. Clicking it brings up a full size version.



We've tried Google Maps on mobiles before but what's different here is integrating it with the photo gallery. Thus, from within photo options you can choose to view it on a map.

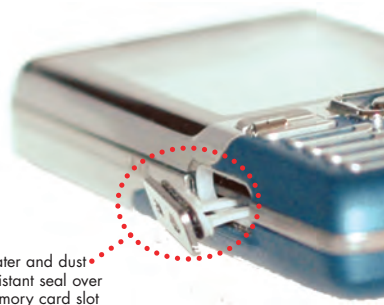


Here's our boat ramp photo - showing where it was taken in Google Maps for Mobile. Viewing is possible either from a satellite or map perspective.



Water and dust resistant seal in the C702i's battery cover

Water and dust resistant seal over memory card slot



The best way to think of this product is as a regular phone - plus. It's regular sized (not too chunky), an optimised imaging product, includes a GPS (and associated services) and is splash and dust resistant.

A pretty good all-round active lifestyle bundle - without the compromises that sometimes result from over optimising a specific feature.

Parts of this phone seal better than regular phones, making it more resistant to things such as rain, sand and dust.