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Palm version of Treo 700 arrives

By Ben Ames, IDG News Service

Months after the Windows version (which we reviewed in January) Palm is launching a Palm version of its Treo 700 smartphone next Monday.

Launched in the US, with 3G (EV-DO) wireless, the Treo 700p is the first Palm smartphone on 3G, and the second of four new devices Palm will launch this year. With e-mail and Office functions, a digital camera and MP3 music player, it should appeal to both consumer and enterprise users, said Steve Sinclair, a senior product manager at Palm.

Smartphones are now crucial to Palm's business. In March, swelling Treo sales pushed the company past earnings estimates for the first quarter of 2006 despite falling demand for the PDAs which the company started out making.

Palm says that success is also helping it to win a greater share of the smartphone segment, as the company posted 111 percent growth in units sold from 2004 to 2005, while the market grew just 65 percent.

Research in Motion (RIM) still leads the 4.85 million unit smartphone market with 53 percent market share, Palm said. But Palm holds a strong second place with 33 percent. Other vendors, including Samsung, Hewlett-Packard, Motorola, Nokia and Sony Ericsson, each have 3 percent or less.

Like the existing 700w, which runs Windows Mobile OS, the 700p uses EvDO networking, offers a 1.3 megapixel digital camera, and stocks 128 Mbyte of memory, all driven by a 312MHz Intel XScale processor.

One benefit for the Palm version is ability for laptop users to use it as a wireless modem, connected with either a USB (Universal Serial Bus) cable or Bluetooth wireless.

Despite their similarities, the Treo models could appeal to different users.

"The 700w and 700p are comparable in the sense they are both designed to be able to handle anything really well, but I expect the platforms to drift toward different segments," Linsalata said. "For mobile enterprise, Microsoft has a stronger hold, while the Palm version could drift toward a more balanced role."

Even in the US, the Treo 700p is not yet in stores. Palm said telephony carriers Sprint and Verizon Wireless would soon announce pricing and availability.

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