

PDAs: Palm Z22 Review

Iâ??ve been trying to simplify my life, and one area is in my use of PDAs. I realized that my PDA use tends to have more to do with tweaking and trying to make the device work better than actually using it as a productivity tool. (See my article "PDAs: Back To The Basics".)

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So, after some pondering and research, I decided to "step down" to a Palm Z22 PDA. After a couple weeks of use, I have to say that I just love it! No, itâ??s not feature-packed like other high-end PDAs on the marketâ??in fact, itâ??s much simpler in design and function. But that was my goal: to simplify. Read on for a review of this fine PDAâ?¦.

In my "PDAs: Back To The Basics" article, I explained the benefits of the slimmed-down Z22 PDA, but here, Iâ??m going to get into more of the technical details, including features (or lack thereof), what I dislike, and what I like about the Z22. Iâ??m also going to detail the applications that I have installed. Hopefully, you will come to appreciate its simplicity.

The Palm Z22 is Palmâ??s latest entry-level PDA offering targeted at those who have never used PDAs. But I contend that its usefulness is not limited to the PDA novice. While it is definitely not feature-packed like Palmâ??s latest Tungsten TX, or LifeDrive, it captures the simplicity of Palmâ??s original PDA concepts with some nice 21st century enhancements. And at under $100.00, you get decent features that wonâ??t break the bank.

OK, letâ??s get to some specificsâ?¦.

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Construction

The Z22â??s case construction is all plastic. Most recent PDAs tend to be mostly metal-cased, so I was a bit unsure about this. It does, however, appear to be very sturdy. After flexing and squeezing it a bit, it seems to be solid. In looks, it looks somewhat like an iPOD from the front with a sleek, smooth white face.

giving it a very modern look. The back is a semi-clear blue plastic reminiscent of the iMac. Its design is very curvy, and it fits in the hand nicely. Itâ??s sturdier than I expected for such a low-priced PDA.

On the top is a sub-mini USB connector for HotSyncing, and a holder for the stylus.

On the back is a reset button that is flush to the back surface that is large enough for the stylus tipâ??no more bent paperclips!

Buttons

The buttons are large and flush to the face of the Z22 with small depressions making it easy to feel. The 5-way navigator pad is a round ring with a select button in the middle. Overall, the buttons feels very good, and there are responsive.

Of significant note is that Palm reduced the number of buttons on the Z22 from most other models. There is a power button, 2 hard application buttons (set to launch the Calendar and Contacts apps, but user-configurable) and the 5-way nav padâ?¦thatâ??s it. If you rely on more buttons, you will be disappointed. However, I did find an excellent workaround in the Hi-Launcher application. See below for details. The limited number of buttons actually simplifies use.

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Screen Protection

Like many seasoned PDA users, Iâ??m always concerned with the screen becoming scratched or broken, so some sort of case is definitely needed. The Z22 comes with no case or cover. I have always been partial to Belg Designsâ?? Leather Flip Case with Belt Clip, but it does boost the geek-rating a bit, requiring you to hang your PDA on your belt. Itâ??s an excellent case, though. I am also partial to Proportaâ??s Crystal Case for the Palm T3â??I simply love it, and I recommend that case in a heartbeat. UnfUnfortunatelyroporta does not offer a Crystal Case for the Z22, and I really donâ??t want a PDA hanging on my belt.

I discovered that Palm offers a hard, clear "Air Case" that reminds me of Proportaâ??s Crystal Case offerings. (See my review of the Air Case here.) The Air Case is not as robust as Proportaâ??s Crystal Cases, but it is still a decent case for the price of under $15.00. The combination of the Palm Z22 and the Palm Air Case really makes for a sleek, pocketable PDA that provides excellent, simple features.

Palm Air Case	Z22 in the Air Case
{mosimage}	{mosimage}

Palm does include a thin screen protector that will help prevent scratching. It sticks to the screen, and is easily removable and replaceable.

Size

Wowâ?¦this sucker is small! The Z22 makes other Palm PDAs seem huge by comparison, yet it fits my hand nicely, and is easy to hold. For a size comparison (at least the screen anyway) a look at the included Screen Protector: compare the outline of the Z22 to the rest, and yes, it is Palmâ??s smallest yet. This kind of takes me back to the Palm V days with its sleek lines, slim form factor, and small size. The size of the Z22 certainly doesnâ??t disappointâ??in fact, itâ??s one of its assets.

But what did palm pack into the minuscule Z22? Surprisingly, a lotâ?¦.

Memory

Compared to most other PDAs, the Z22â??s 20MB of memory seems minuscule. While it has been a challenge to decide which applications are "necessary" and which are not, it turns out that 20MB really provides lots of space with room to spare. It is so easy to fill it up, (especially if you have amassed hundreds of Palm applications over a decade!) but the challenge was to decide whatâ??s important and whatâ??s not, so eventually, I installed those applications and data files that I really needed. It left me with over 3.5MB of free space! (Iâ??ll detail this later on in this article.)

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Screen

OK, this could be the Achilles heel of the Z22 for some people. First, understand that Iâ??m VERY used to Hi-resolution devices, so "stepping back" to a 160Ã?160 screen was very difficult at first. But you know, it really isnâ??t that bad. Most PalmOS applications are written to accommodate a standard 160Ã?160 screen, so most applications run and look just fine.

That said, there are some notable incompatibilities. The big ones for me is Mobi-Systemsâ?? Mobile Office Pro and AstraWareâ??s Bejeweled 2. They are designed for high-resolution screens only, and thatâ??s that. So Iâ??m back to using Documents To Go and Bejeweled. While it is disappointing given my investment in both, this is not a major issue considering my stated goal of simplicity.

The next issue is "color bleeding". Colors have a tendency to bleed a bit displaying visible lines of color extending down the screen. I guess the good news is that this is only really noticeable on screens that have lots of color elements. Most productivity applications where the majority of screen information is text, itâ??s notnoticeablee. It would be nice however, if the screen did not do this. Sure, I would really like to see a high-resolution screen on the Z22 form factor, but given my simplicity goals, itâ??s turning out to be not really necessary.

Finally, the Z22â??s screen is virtually unreadable in sunlight. I really wish it had a screen that would be more visible in sunlight (and South Carolina sun is b-r-i-g-h-t!) Of course, the Z22 isnâ??t the only LCD-equipped consumer device thatâ??s unreadable in the sun.

Speed

The Z22â??s 200MHz processor is pretty peppy. I only notice "lag" when moving from one application to another, and mostly when launching an application that hasnâ??t been launched in a while. This is a departure from Palmâ??s very typically snappy application switching. My guess is that the Z22 is caching applications, and if the application you want to run isnâ??t cached, then thereâ??s a slight "load lag". This, no doubt, likely has more to do with the Z22â??s use of NVRAM than with the processor itself.

It is a bit unnerving just seeing a blank white screen for several seconds before app displays, but for most people, this wonâ??t be that noticeable. The Z22 ran all applications I have thrown at it quickly. After using other high-end Palm PDAs, the Z22 isnoticeablyy slower on some counts, but overall, it doesnâ??t make you wait.

Installed Applications:

Below is a list of the applications that I currently have installed. This provides me with the "essential" applications and data I need, along with some minor superfluous applications, (I know, I know, simplicity, Jimâ?¦.) All that leaves me with just over 3MB of free memory space. I had to really strip things down to get to this point, but then again, that was my goal. I simply kept asking myself, "Do I truly need this application"? I could still remove some, but for now, Iâ??m satisfied.

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Stock PIM apps
I decided to forgo all third-party PIM replacements (with one exception), specifically Pimlico Softwareâ??s DateBK5. This is an excellent application, and its features are rich, but I want to give the stock PIM applications a chance, hoping that they will work well for me. So far, Iâ??m finding them to be robust and effective, especially the Calendar app.

LifeBalance
This is the one exception as a third-party PIM replacement app that Iâ??m demoing. LifeBalance is a very interesting application. When I first tried it, I simply didnâ??t get it, so I dismissed it. But since understanding David Allenâ??s "Getting Things Done" concepts, I get it, and I find it to be invaluable. LifeBalanceâ??s design is, in my opinion, how Palmâ??s Tasks app should be. LifeBalance is a simple, yet effective way of managing lots of "Next Actions" and "Contexts". Its implementation is very well thought-out, and I think Iâ??ll put this to good use.

{mosimage}

mNotes
This is an essential application for syncing my Palm with Lotus Notes at work.

ZLauncher

ZLauncher has a large footprint, but itâ??s what Iâ??m used to, and I have always loved this launcher. Zlauncher is a complex application launcher, but it can be configured down to a quite minimal, simple form. Itâ??s also nice to know that there are a number of features (like a File Manager) under the hood should I need them. {mosimage}

Hi-Launcher

Hi-Launcher is an application that I purchased long, long ago, and until recently really had no use for. But after installing it on my Z22, I find it to be completely invaluable! Hi-Launcher easily makes up for the reduced number of hard buttons on the Z22. I configured it to "trigger" when I press the hard Contacts button. It pops up a concise list of my favorite and recent applications. Itâ??s fully navigable with the 5-way nav pad, so no stylus is ever needed. I highly recommend this application for Z22 all users! {mosimage}

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Palmâ??s Calculator

This simple included calculator has a lot of nice, hidden functionsâ?¦if you know how to find them. I had no idea that you could enable an Advanced mode through the Options menu! The advanced mode adds decent math, finance, statistics, and conversion functions that most people should find very usable. Unless you have specialized needs, thereâ??s really no need for any third-party calculators. {mosimage}

MyBible

MyBible is an excellent Bible reference application that works very well on the Z22. I installed the KJV and Life Application Notes files. This took up a HUGE amount of spaceâ??over 9MBâ??but it is important to me to have this. Book access is quick, especially with the 5-way nav pad, and searches are as fast as any Palm PDA model. {mosimage}

HandStory

I find HandStory to be the easiest and quickest way to get text data into my Palm. My method may be a kludge, but it works very well and very quickly for me: Copy any text from any source, paste it into the UltraEdit text editor, clean it up as needed, copy the text, and convert using HandStory to a Palm DOC file which auto-installs on next HotSync. Itâ??s fast & simple, and the reader app is top-notch. (One caveat: Handstory is not 100% 5-way nav compatible in its list screen.) {mosimage}

Frotz
OK, this is completely superfluous, but I admit it: I love to poke around in Zork 1, 2, and 3! Frotz lets you play old Infocom text adventure games. Yes, this really dates me, but sometimes, gamies in the mind are more exciting than gamies seen with the eyes. {mosimage}

Klondike
Everyone has to have a portable card game, and this version of Klondike has been my favorite for many years. This version of Klondike is rock solid, and is very configurable. Yes, there are other card programs with many more gamies, but this is simple and fun! {mosimage}

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Monopoly
Capitalism on a Zen device! What more can I say? Well, I can say that Monopoly plays well on the Z22. The colors are great, game play is quick, and itâ??s lots of fun. {mosimage}

SuLite One
Yes, I too caught the Sudoku bug. SuLite One is a great, free Sudoku implementation that is surprisingly configurable. Itâ??s great for burning time (when itâ??s appropriate, of course!) and itâ??s very playable on a 160Ã?160 screen. {mosimage}

PixMarker
I love to doodle, and PixMakrer is my favorite doodling app for the Palm. Though I have to admit that I really miss the larger, hi-resolution screen for this one. {mosimage}

Things I Donâ??t Like

OK, those are the technical points about the Z22. Here are some things that I do not like about the Z22. None are deal-breakers for me, but they may be for some.

Brightness/Contrast Setting
When you reset the Z22 (either by selecting a software reset from an app like ZLauncher or pressing the reset button on the back) the screen brightness and contrast revert to factory defaults. This might be

desirable for some, but I find it annoying. Of course, the reality is that we shouldnâ??t have to reset that oftenâ?¦

Sound Volume
Sound on the Z22 is not as loud as I would like it to be. Its alarm is not that loud, though I can hear itâ??probably due to a decade of familiarity with the standard Palm alarm sound. I really wish it would be louder. Arenâ??t alarms supposed to be annoyingâ??enough to
actually get your attention?

Older Security Screens
Come on, Palm. Youâ??ve produced countless incarnations of the PalmOS, and yet the Z22 doesnâ??t have the nice PIN-pad security screen that the Tungsten T3â??s security update provides. The Z22â??s security screen is a big step backward requiring a stylus for entry. How tough could it have been to implement something a bit more modern?

Iâ??m demoing the AppLock program, and it looks really slick, yet simple to at least provide application locking with easy key entry. Yes, there are other Palm security suites out there, but for simplicity, AppLock seems to be just what I need. Check it out!

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Screen
As mentioned above, the screen could be better. Some have complained about getting headaches after looking at it for a long time, but fortunately this hasnâ??t been an issue for me. A crisper, high-resolution screen that is viewable in the sunlight would be an nice upgrade.

Things I like about the Z22

Now for the good stuff. There are lots of things about the Z22 that i really like.

Battery life
So far, battery life is excellent. It very well might be measured in weeks as opposed to hours. In agreement with another review that I read, the short time connected to my PC via its USB cable during a HotSync (maybe 10-15 minutes) seems to be more than enough to "top off" the battery to full charge. This is a huge boon in that I no longer have to worry about battery life. With regular use, it looks like the batter will last much longer than most modern models.

Brightness/Contrast Setting
While I listed this as a negative, one positive point is that the brightness setting has a simple 2-level setting: Low and High. I find the High setting to be perfect for normal daytime use, and the Low setting great at night in low light conditions. Do we really need the granular brightness control of other models?

Calendar
The Calendar application now has a nice Agenda view. Itâ??s not as configurable as say, DateBk6, but it certainly works well, presenting upcoming appointments and tasks. Itâ??s uncluttered, and very effective fitting in with my simplicity goals.

One-Handed Navigation
Being able to navigate an application without having to pull out a stylus is very nice. Either I never really noticed it, or it just wasnâ??t as robust, but no other PalmOS PDA I have ever owned had the depth of really decent 5-way navigator integration like the Z22 has. I can navigate almost any application with just the 5-way navigator pad, and itâ??s intuitive. It works very well with all the stock apps, and most third-party apps I have tried. Major kudos to Palm for getting this right!

USB HotSync Cable
My first reaction to this was "Oh great, yet another HotSync connector thatâ??s again incompatible with every other one Palm has introduced in the past." While this may be technically true, the fact that itâ??s a standard sub-mini USB connector means that I can HotSync with any standard sub-mini USB cable (most geeks have several lying around.) HotSyncing is quick and effortless like most Palm models. No, there isnâ??t a nice cradle to put it into, but then again, my Z22 should either be in my hand being used, or in my pocket so I donâ??t forget to take it with me. I have left other Palms in their cradles too often.

Stability
So far, the Z22 has been very solid. The only reason Iâ??ve had to reset has been when I try to push it too far with less-than-stable applications. I did have to do a hard reset at one point, but it was my fault. I tried to install the above mentioned Security patch from the T3, and the Z22 simply didnâ??t like it. No file manager I tried would delete it, so I had to resort to doing a hard reset. But a simple HotSync after the hard reset restored everything back to where I needed it to be.

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Conclusion

For my stated purpose of simplicity, the Z22 really canâ??t be beat. It is powerful enough to handle essential applications, yet itâ??s limitations force you to make important decisions as to just what applications are really essential. No, itâ??s not feature-packed, and it wonâ??t win any awards for advanced designs, but it is what it is, and it does it well. The sleek, pocketable design, really shines.

For people who have never tried out PDAs, the Z22 is an inexpensive way to jump into the PDA world without breaking the bank. For power users who are expecting a power PDA, you will be disappointedâ??look elsewhere. But I believe that any user, power or otherwise, who wants to have a decent PDA while maintaining a level of simplicity, may find the Z22 to be the answer.

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