

Durable Smartphone

Fairphone with Google Free /e/OS

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While sitting in the train the guy in front of me surprised me, out of his fancy pants he pulled this well worn, patina rich, piece of tech. We're travelling first class and judging by his classy attire, this man is not of limited means. Like a well-raced Porsche, this thing has seen some action. Sunlight hitting the metal frame reveals a green hue, I recognise it to be an earlier generation Fairphone still going strong. This changed my view on smartphones, please read along.

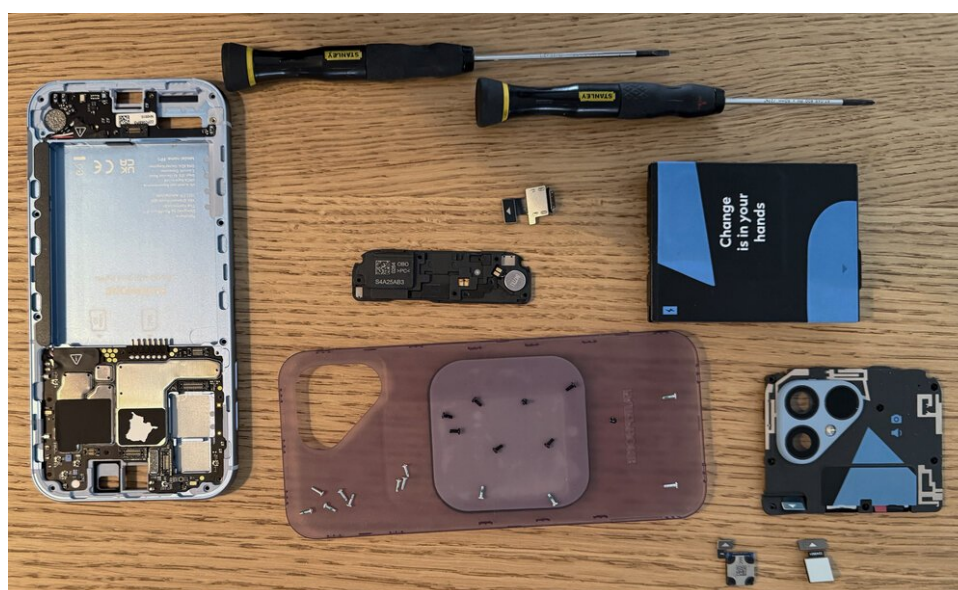


Wear as Trophy: Racing a Porsche or running a Fairphone, the scars tell the epic tale - racing on Zandvoort with my buddy Niels!

Unlike the fragile flagship phones with their delicately glued pieces of glass, the Fairphone is built to withstand and to be serviced. Its military grade drop resistance and IP55 water and dust rating, are complemented with easy access to its parts. If needed, you can replace pretty much all parts - including the 4200mAh battery. It runs standard Android with updates guaranteed up to 2031, made possible by the choice for an industrial IoT chip powering the phone. The Qualcomm Dragonwing QCM6490 with 8 cores and 8GB RAM is designed with longevity in mind, critical for enterprise grade applications where changing chipsets every season is undesirable. The Dragonwing chips power nautical vessels, harbour cranes, manufacturing plants and various drones. One has to appreciate this thorough thinking on durability that the Fairphone company puts in its design, reaching well beyond mere looks.

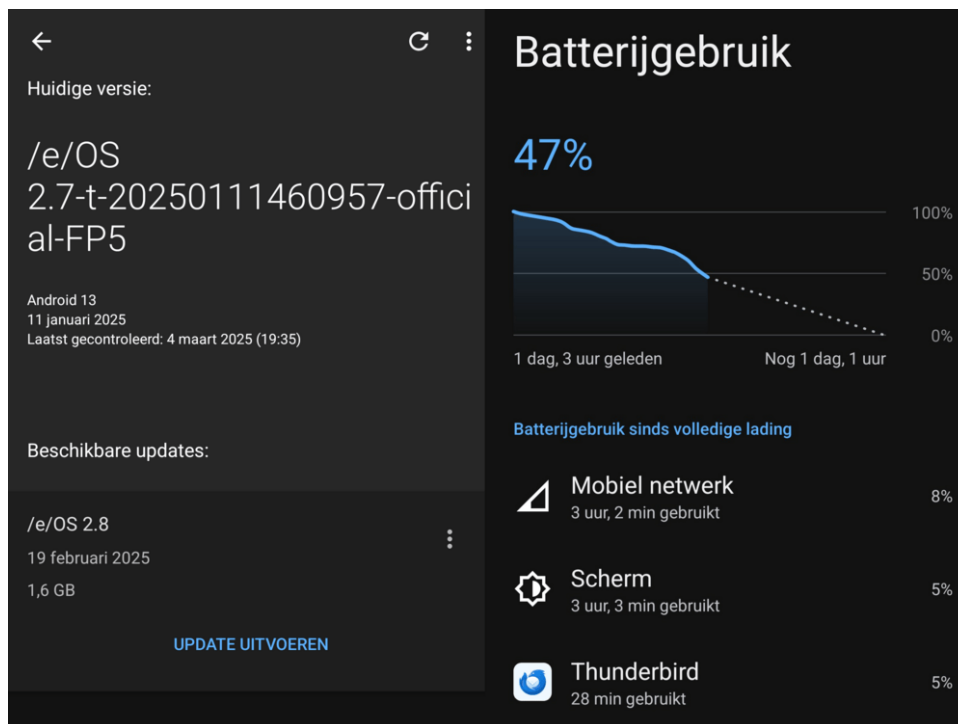


Fairphone is powered by the same Dragonwing chip that is used in ships, cranes, drones and industrial plants



Designed to last and easy to service: Fairphone 5 can be opened with standard tools

The phone comes with standard Google Android, fully compatible with all the apps in the Play Store. You are free however to unlock the bootloader and install any software you want. One popular alternative option is Google-Free Android, [/e/OS](https://www.phoronix.com/news/Android-12-0-100-100-100). This gives you a lean and clean operating system that you can tailor to your liking and which can be used without **any** need for a cloud account. It is easy to love the privacy advantages this liberation from American big tech gives you, but I am particularly stunned by the increase in software efficiency: without all the crap my battery usage is measured in **DAYS** when running /e/OS.



With deGoogled Android, my Fairphone's battery life is measured in days

Inspired by the freedom of the serviceable [Framework laptop](#), I decided to switch to Fairphone about a month ago. Migrating from iPhone can be a bit tricky. I would recommend that you first [free yourself from Apple Photos](#) and that you switch to an [open standard for addressbook and calendar synchronisation](#). The less dependent you are on any particular proprietary service, the easier it is to switch. There are many subtle vendor lock-in mechanisms possibly playing you, like:

- **Parental controls** on your kids' iPad require an Apple device for yourself, too; I tuned down parental control as I seek to instill more self responsibility on my kids, this is definitely a work in progress
- **Safari's Reading List and Bookmarks** do not sync to non-Apple devices; I solved this by adopting a simple bookmarks file
- **Find My** (Friends, AirTags, Peripherals) only works if you have an Apple device; alternatives exist but switching is cumbersome
- **Facetime** video calls can only be initiated if you have an Apple device; luckily there are many other apps for video calls
- **iMessage** is Apple only, I switched to WhatsApp, Signal and e-mail
- **Books** bought in the Apple iBook Store can only be read on Apple devices, stores like Kobo work cross-platform and there are various DRM-free options available, too
- **Structured health and fitness data** is locked in Apple HealthKit, exporting it is possible, but it flattens and simplifies the data or requires third-party apps to read the exported files

Your mileage may vary, but none of these things kept me from switching. Give yourself a chance to get used to Android, and you'll probably find features and freedom unlike on other platforms. Some things I like:

- I can use rsync to automatically copy photos and workout data to my laptop, no cloud needed, over the local wifi using [Syncopoli](#)
- I use the minimalistic ["unLauncher"](#) instead of pages full of colourful icons and widgets screaming for attention
- I can explicitly *allow* specific apps to continue running in the background, without any restriction on power or computing resources, this is useful for some of the weird things I do for work
- I can have selective push email notifications using [IMAP-idle](#) and the [Thunderbird-app](#) without having to rely on vendor specific protocols or cloud services like Microsoft 365, Gmail or iCloud
- I upgraded the storage memory [for €90](#) to 1TB, a similar upgrade of memory in iPhone 16 Pro costs € 630

I'm sure that I'll discover more things to like as I expect to keep using the Fairphone. There was *one last thing* that I wanted to do to make my Fairphone my own. I like things to have their natural, raw colour. [My watch is titanium](#) and [I removed the paint from my bike](#). I decided to disassemble the Fairphone and remove its PVD coating, making the aluminium fully visible in its natural colour. I used some sanding paper to carefully brush the metal frame. I know this look is not for everyone, but I stumbled upon this post on X gaining much attention, ensuring me I am not alone in appreciating the raw beauty of well used tools. The phone is now uniquely my own, I love it.



Let tools be tools: let the aluminium be like a canvas depicting usage patterns



Using sanding paper to remove paint from the Fairphone

Conclusion

I have changed my mind on frequently upgrading my smartphone. The nascent years of modern smartphone innovation are over. Newer models are increasingly similar to previous models. The real tangible benefits of having a new smartphone are getting smaller. Especially if you can service parts that are subject to wear and tear. And if you remove unneeded weight and bloat from the software, you'll be in for some great action - much like the Porsche on track!

Fairphone €50 discount

Consider buying a Fairphone? If you use this link you'll get €50 discount: shop.fairphone.com.



My Fairphone 5 in natural aluminium with the unLauncher on Google-Free /e/OS