Covers story: E-book readers

Lilac Touch and Sony Touch have joined the Nook Simple Touch and Kobo eReader Touch. And there's the Kindle Touch. Touch capability tends to add to the price of an e-book reader, but on the best models, it provides crisp page turns with minimal effort. It also allows you to use a virtual keyboard and other onscreen controls that are bigger and easier to press than the small physical keys and controls on some non-touch models.

But you might not want to use touch control, at least not all the time. We prefer that touch-screen models also have turnbars as an alternative way to change pages; those models include the top-rated Barnes & Noble Simple Touch.

The under-fourtescent reader is here. The new Kindle and the new Sony Reader each weigh a little less than $40, but that's at least 25 percent less than their predecessors, and it's 50 percent less than some competitors that also have 6-inch black-and-white screens and Wi-Fi. Color capability adds weight (the color models were rated at least 11.5 ounces). The color models usually need more A/C connectivity, which also adds weight, although not as modestly.

**Download books three ways.** One model in the Ratings, the Aluratek Deluxe Color Reader, requires a physical connection to a computer to purchase new content. All of the other models are wireless and allow book purchases via Wi-Fi, which we think works better for most people. Most of the higher-rated devices come in versions that have 3G service as well as Wi-Fi. They usually cost $20 more than those with only Wi-Fi-only_service. Choose a model only if being able to order new books anywhere is as vital that you're prepared to pay extra for that capability.

Library lending goes wireless. The ability to borrow e-books from more than 10,000 Libraries nationwide has been a feature on a number of e-book readers for a while. And now, for the first time, every model in the Ratings has that capability.

The borrowing process usually requires downloading software to a computer. After that, you can order and download books from the library. They are transferred from a computer to an e-book reader via a USB cable. There are no late fines; tie borrowed title simply won't open on your library after the due date.

Sony and Amazon have made the library process wireless, via Wi-Fi, on their new models, and on most older models if they've received a free firmware update. Wireless means on Sony can be completed without a computer, downloading directly to the e-book reader. With Kindles, you must insert the title of the book you want to borrow into your computer as a plumber, then sync it to your phone or tablet, before it will show up on your Kindle.

First look: A Kindle gets the touch

Kindle Touch e-reader model - $99

Amazon's first touch-screen e-reader model, the Kindle Touch, is expected late November. It's a direct competitor to the Nook Simple Touch and Kobo eReader Touch, the top-rated models in our Ratings.

The Touch has about 2.5-day battery life over the Nook's 1.8: more than 1.5 ounces lighter, and it's substantially different in an e-book reader. And with prices that start at $50 ($49 for a Wi-Fi version with ads and special offers), the Touch will cost up to $40 less than the Nook.

Here are observations about the Kindle Touch, based on specifications and our reporter's look at an early version:

**Faster page turns.** A look at the better e-readers on the market, including the Nook, the Touch has a 4-inch screen that is more than the latest Pearl version of the e-book reader. Its pages look clearer, black-and-white screens, and touch interaction with the Kindle Touch, that's the new 8GB Nook Simple Touch, stand out. In fact, a page in one can be read in about three seconds.

**Better touch.** Like the Nook Simple Touch, the Kindle Touch uses internal touch technology, which eliminates the need for the additional glass layer that makes the new Kindle Touch easier to read on-screen. Unlike the Simple Touch, the Kindle Touch unfortunately does not offer page-turn controls as an alternative means of turning pages.

**New book resource.** The Kindle Touch has a feature it has a feature called X-Ray button that allows you to view references to characters and phrases throughout literature. It will also display Wikipedia articles on historical figures, places, and events, among other items. The feature works best when it's looking for what our reporter saw, though it is interesting to see how many kinds of books owners actually use it.

**Bottom line.** We don't know how the Amazon device will stack up in performance. Watch it as it arrives and expect to report the results in our January issue.

As with other Kindle models, the Kindle Touch packs a lot of power, including the ability to read books on a variety of devices, including tablets and smartphones. It also supports a wide range of file formats and can be used as a computer or a e-reader. The Kindle Touch is also available in a Wi-Fi version, which allows you to download books from Amazon's Kindle Store. Overall, the Kindle Touch is a great choice for anyone looking for a high-quality e-reader.