Apple Unveils 4G iPad with Quad-Core Graphics and Retina Display

Apple pulled back the curtain on its next generation of consumer products in San Francisco on Wednesday, revealing a quad-core GPU, 4G version of the iPad — complete with the rumored “Retina Display” — and a 1080p update to its Apple TV box.
While the new device specs and features didn’t stray far from the whirlwind of speculation that led up to today’s event, there was one conspicuous absence — new version numbers. The new tablet is called “the new iPad,” not the iPad 3.

But as far as beefed-up specs go, the refreshed slate lives up to much of its pre-announcement hype. The new iPad’s display was upgraded to a 2048 x 1536 Retina display with more than 3.1 million pixels, and is powered by Apple’s A5x processor, which remain dual core for CPU functions, but features quad-core graphics.

At 0.37 inches and 1.44 pounds, the new tablet is slightly thicker and heavier than the previous iPad 2 version. An updated camera dubbed the iSight camera has been added to the tablet’s back panel. It features the same optics as the camera in the iPhone 4S with a 5MP chip and 1080p video-recording capabilities with video stabilization and temporal noise reduction.

To some degree, Apple is playing catch-up with the Android tablets currently on the market. The Asus Eee Pad Transformer Prime is available now with a 1.4GHz quad-core Nvidia Tegra 3 chipset, while the Samsung Galaxy Tab was the king — until today — of the tablet display field with a Super AMOLED Plus display.

Of course, none of that matters now that Apple has met or surpassed those specs. The iPad’s ease-of-use and tight integration with all things Apple will make it difficult for an Android tablet maker to challenge its dominance.

To help take advantage of the new camera, iPhoto for iOS for was introduced for the iPad and iPhone. Rife with multi-touch support, the app features smart browsing, multi-touch editing, editing brushes, virtual albums, and introduces Photo Journals to share photos via iCloud with friends. The app is available now for $4.99.

For connectivity, the new iPad sports 4G LTE, leapfrogging the wireless speed of the iPhone 4S. Initially, AT&T, Verizon, Rogers, Bell and Telus will be the only carriers. Apple will produce two versions of the iPad with 4G — one for AT&T and one for Verizon. In a perfect world, download rates could hit 73 Mbps. (This is a best case scenario number, and actual connection speeds will vary.) The new iPad starts at $499 for 16GB Wi-Fi, and will be available on March 16 with pre-orders starting today.

To support all the new apps and updated apps announced today, iOS 5.1 will be available for download today. And while the new iPad is Siri-less, it does offer a dictation feature that converts spoken word to text. Like the iPhone, users tap on the microphone next to the spacebar to activate the feature. Also like the iPhone, the feature works with any app that utilizes the iOS keyboard.

Apple’s ongoing hobby, the Apple TV was also updated today supporting 1080p video and sporting a new UI. The current Apple TV outputs 720p. Like its predecessor, the new Apple TV is priced at $99 and will go on sale March 16 with preorders beginning today. The new UI is available via download today for the current Apple TV.

We’ll have a hands on with the new iPad and Apple TV shortly.

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