One Month with GrapheneOS: A Real-World Review

After a month of daily use with GrapheneOS (see my Installing GrapheneOS: My Experience and Apps Installed After GrapheneOS Setup), I'm ready to share my honest impressions. The bottom line: I'm impressed. Almost everything works well, though there are a few quirks and missing features.

Calendar Notifications

The first calendar app I tried (Calendar by Vayun Mathur on F-Droid) is clean and syncs well with Nextcloud, but it lacks appointment notifications—a feature I rely on. After some research, I switched to Etar (also on F-Droid). Etar has a clean interface, syncs with Davx5, and supports notifications when you set reminders. After installing Etar and granting it background and notification permissions (which may impact battery), notifications worked as expected.

Summary: If you don't need notifications, Calendar is lightweight and permission-free. If you do, Etar is a solid choice.

Automation

I didn't realize how much I relied on automation until it was gone. On stock Android, my phone would automatically enter Do Not Disturb mode at night, exit in the morning, and unlock when connected to my car's Bluetooth. GrapheneOS supports these features at the system level, but lacks a built-in automation controller.

I tried several automation apps: one was closed source and subscription-based, another was open source but required the Google Play Store. I finally found Automation on F-Droid, which works for basic tasks like toggling WiFi at home and enabling DND at bedtime.

However, removing the screen lock when I'm home or driving doesn't work—GrapheneOS restricts this for security. There is a port of Android Auto for GrapheneOS that I may try to see if it can keep the phone unlocked while driving.

Slow Charging and Battery Health

Charging your battery slowly reduces heat and can extend its lifespan. While some Android ROMs allow you to limit charging current (usually requiring root), GrapheneOS does not support this directly.

Instead, I use a lower-power charger. Charging at 700–800mA takes my Pixel 8 from empty to full in about 8 hours and keeps the battery cooler. I rarely let my phone drop below 20%, and I use GrapheneOS's built-in charging limit feature to stop charging at 80% (Settings → Battery → Charging Optimization), which is reported to greatly increase battery longevity.

OSMAnd Navigation

I think I'll stick with OSMAnd for navigation—it's pretty good overall. The main issue is its handling of addresses: OSMAnd seems to expect European-style addresses (street name, then house number), while in the US we use house number first. For example, "101 Main Street" in the US is "Main Street 101" in Europe. This sometimes makes address lookups awkward, especially when mapping contacts.

Traffic-aware routing appears limited or nonexistent. Also, as with all OpenStreetMap-based apps, some addresses are missing (though I've seen this with Google Maps too). I did encounter one odd route that sent me down an alley—something not intended for regular traffic in the US.

Spam Callers

On stock Android, I'd get warnings about potential spam or scam calls. With GrapheneOS, this feature is gone, and there's no way to report spam either. I assume this is tied to Google's data collection, which I'm intentionally avoiding.

I vaguely recall third-party apps that offered spam call protection, so I'll look into those. For now, it's not a dealbreaker—I'd rather not have anyone monitoring my calls unless they're explicit about privacy.

Next Steps

I plan to keep using GrapheneOS for at least another week, then install it on my old Pixel 7a. I'll continue searching for solutions to the minor issues above, but honestly, none of them are dealbreakers. Overall, GrapheneOS has been a solid, privacy-respecting daily driver.

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