

Review: Rubik's TouchCube a little too touchy

September 23 2009, By RON HARRIS , Associated Press Writer



In this photo made Tuesday, Sept. 22, 2009, Techno Source's new Rubik's TouchCube puzzle is shown in Decatur, Ga. (AP Photo/Ron Harris)

(AP) -- Thirty years ago Erno Rubik took a puzzle he had been tinkering with and turned it into the must-have brain twister toy, the Rubik's Cube.

The original was hard enough with its confounding little "cubies," as the competitive Rubik's solvers call them. Now, a company called Techno Source gives you Rubik's TouchCube. The latest version of the cube doesn't require twisting and turning the colored layers at all. Merely the soft swipe of a single finger across its surface will do it. It's a Rubik's Cube for the [iPhone](#) age.

The TouchCube (\$150) goes on sale in October, but not at the same toy stores that stock its distant cousin. The TouchCube will be available

from Best Buy, as well as Amazon.com and Hammacher.com.

It's a little larger and heavier than the original, which hit the mainstream in 1980 and costs a mere \$10 now. It rests on a small stand that also serves as a charger.

There are small icons on each side of the TouchCube that serve various purposes with a deft double-click. One icon turns it on. Another scrambles the cube, and another gives you a hint what your next move should be.

There's even a solve button that will finish the cube for you, making each side one color. The TouchCube makes sounds when you slide your finger across a row of colors, a ratcheting noise that is supposed to represent the turning of internal gears.

Alas, the original remains more fun.

Here's why.

First, this touch-sensitive cube is too sensitive. It's too easy to accidentally swipe your finger across a row of colors and move them while you're simply trying to turn the cube in your hands to plot your next move. There's an undo button that will reverse your most recent move, but by the time I used it I got confused and forgot what position I was trying to improve upon.

Another drawback is that the TouchCube responds only to the finger swipe on the layer of the cube facing up, the top layer. With the original, good cubers can twist the back, sides, front and bottom without having to look at those layers. Once you get good at solving the original cube, this is a common way to maneuver it. It's not possible with the TouchCube.

I can solve the original cube in under a couple of minutes when I'm warmed up. But the new TouchCube left me frustrated for more than 10 minutes. Not because I was puzzled and in search of a solution, but because of all the accidental twisting moves I had to undo and correct.

It's a conversation starter for sure, but the TouchCube pales next to the original Rubik's Cube, which had both a mental and tactile appeal.

On the Net: <http://www.rubikstouchcube.com>

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