

Tech review: Fitness watches help you keep tabs on your vital statistics

October 15 2014, by Jim Rossman, The Dallas Morning News

I'm old enough to have seen wristwatches fall out of favor, replaced by the cellphones in our pockets.

But everything eventually makes a comeback, and watches are now getting lots of buzz, thanks to Samsung and Apple and a few other gadget makers.

Of course, the Apple Watch could bring in lots of first-time watch-wearers.

The Apple Watch will be released next year; meanwhile, other companies are releasing fitness watches. Today we are looking at two, the Garmin Vivosmart and the Wellograph Wellness Watch.

WELLOGRAPH

The Wellness Watch from Wellograph (\$349, wellograph.com) is a close cousin of the Apple Watch in the fit, finish and design departments.

What the Wellograph does - health monitoring and telling time - it does well.

It's not a smartwatch. It does sync with your phone or tablet to report on the health data it collects, but it does not have any data functionality such as reading texts, controlling music or answering phone calls like some

other watches.

A [heart-rate monitor](#) is built in to the backside of the watch case.

The Wellograph is the first watch I've tried that could read my heart rate continuously. It's a great feature - one that Apple included in its watch.

Apple has also copied Wellograph's sapphire glass watch face, which is the most scratch-resistant glass I've ever seen.

As you'd expect, there's also a pedometer, powered by a nine-axis motion sensor. Mine was wildly inaccurate at first, but a software update during my test period brought adjustable sensitivity to improve accuracy.

The watch has a 1.26-inch monochrome display (not a touchscreen) that's controlled by two buttons. If you've ever had to navigate the hierarchical menus of a printer, you'll be right at home with the Wellograph.

Aside from time, steps taken and heart rate, the other modes include a graph of activity vs. idle time during the day, and a stopwatch.

The watch syncs with a free smartphone app available for iOS, Android and Windows phones.

You can sync the phone whenever it's convenient. The watch can store four months of data.

It's waterproof down to 160 feet, and it can run seven days on a charge.

The Wellograph charges on a small magnetic dock that connects to power through USB.

It weighs just 3.5 ounces, and while it's rather thick, the Wellograph did not get in the way of my regular activities.

Yes, the Wellograph's retail price is \$349, which is in line with the entry-level price for the Apple Watch.

I like the Wellograph, but at that price, I like it a lot less after watching Apple chief executive Tim Cook's introduction of the Apple Watch, which has a color touchscreen and many more features.

PROS: Beautiful design, tough screen, heart rate monitor built in, easy to wear.

COPS: Expensive. Limited feature set for the price.

BOTTOM LINE: Wellograph has the high-end fitness watch market cornered for now. Let's see how they react when Apple jumps in next year.

VIVOSMART

Back in August I reviewed the Garmin Vivofit, a very nice fitness monitor.

In that review, I ended with, "If the Vivofit were able to show me my text messages, upcoming appointments or the caller ID of my smartphone, I could be a smartwatch convert.

"Until then, I'm happy with the Vivofit's existing features and can't wait to see where this market is headed."

I wish I could take the credit, but Garmin must have had the Vivosmart in the pipeline already.

The Vivosmart (\$169.99 and \$199.99 with a heart rate monitor at garmin.com) has all the fitness features of the Vivofit plus some smartwatch features, such as caller ID display and the ability to read incoming text messages or other notifications from your smartphone. It can also control your music playback.

The Vivosmart has a small touchscreen. Users swipe across to change the information displayed.

A quick double-tap turns on the display, which is easy to read.

It auto-syncs to your smartphone, which worked well. When I checked the Garmin Connect app on my iPhone, the step count was always current.

Garmin added vibration alerts to the Vivosmart, which is brilliant.

The Vivofit flashes a red bar on the screen when it wants you to get up and move; the Vivosmart vibrates on your wrist.

You can also set simple alarms that vibrate, and even have it vibrate for incoming calls or messages if your phone is set to silent mode.

It has a good motion sensor/pedometer and accurately tracks movement and calories burned.

Heart rate is taken with an optional band worn around the user's chest.

The Vivosmart's battery needs a weekly charge, which is done with a strange spring-loaded dock with pins that connect to contacts on the back of the band.

PROS: Great fitness monitoring, good smartphone integration and a

great design that's comfortable to wear, plus it's priced right.

CONS: Wish it had a built-in [heart rate](#) monitor.

BOTTOM LINE: This is the right combination of features for me. It's a winner.

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Citation: Tech review: Fitness watches help you keep tabs on your vital statistics (2014, October 15) retrieved 23 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-10-tech-tabs-vital-statistics.html>

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