

Review: Virtual reality? Samsung Gear VR looks pretty real to me

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Virtual reality goggles. When I type those words, I think of very bulky helmets worn at high-end arcades or at trade shows.

Even today, Oculus is grabbing some headlines with its Rift VR headset (\$350 for a developer kit), but the only place I've seen it used is at Chuck E. Cheese.

Virtual reality goggles haven't hit the mainstream yet, but Samsung and Oculus have teamed up to bring us the Samsung Gear VR powered by Oculus.

The Gear VR (\$199.99, available from Samsung or AT&T) is a set of VR goggles designed specifically to work with a Samsung Galaxy Note 4 smartphone.

The Gear VR uses the Note 4 as the goggles' screen. The phone is not included, so if you don't have a Note 4, you can't use these goggles. The phone snaps into the goggles and docks via microUSB.

The resulting [virtual reality](#) experience is very impressive and very immersive.

The Gear VR is so cool I wanted to just sit back and play with it all day long. But I had work to do, so after an hour or so, I had to let some other people take a turn.

The Gear VR looks like oversized ski goggles. The device has a proximity sensor that turns the goggles on when you put them on your face. The goggles also have an accelerometer, a gyrometer and compass. When you move your head, the goggles know it and change the view accordingly.

The Gear VR has a few controls, a small touchpad, a "back" button, volume controls and a focus knob to help you see the action clearly. The goggles won't really work with glasses.

When the goggles are in use, the phone is actually displaying two identical images, one for each eye. You can't really see this in action, as the VR software stops if you take the goggles off your face.

There were two software titles I spent the most time with.

One is an educational program called theBluVR featuring ocean creatures that swim all around you. The large shark slowly circling you is very disconcerting and very cool. There is narration about each type of marine life you encounter. The sound works best if you're wearing ear buds.

I was also very impressed with a solar system simulator called Titans of Space that lets you zoom around the solar system as if you're on a big space walk.

The Gear VR comes with a 16-gigabyte microSD card preloaded with 360-degree movies and video trailers.

There are also games available. Some games need a Bluetooth controller, which is available, and other games need only the goggles.

The software titles available now are free and very limited.

So what are these goggles all about?

I believe the Gear VR is about the future - about what can come after this model.

Not to say that the Gear VR isn't very slick. I want one, but it's not because of the few novelty titles available today.

I can see the goggle form factor catching on for certain situations. I'd wear the Gear VR on an airplane to watch a movie or play a game. I can see this as a decent way to pass the time on a road trip. These things would keep kids occupied for hours.

If you think about the Gear VR as a game console, the price is not outrageous.

Samsung and Oculus have proved the concept with the Gear VR, and I see this as the start of a pretty cool line of products.

I should also mention that Google has a product called Cardboard, which is a kit for making your own VR [goggles](#) using cardboard and your own smartphone. It's worth a look if you want to explore VR but don't own a Note 4.

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Pros: Cool virtual reality really immerses you in another world.

Cons: Need to own a Galaxy Note 4.

Bottom line: If you have a Note 4, the Gear VR is a great addition.

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