

Review: Is Microsoft Band 2 a smartwatch or fitness band?

December 23 2015, by Jim Rossman, The Dallas Morning News



Wearables. Perhaps you've heard of the term. It refers to personal

technology gadgets designed to be worn on your body.

I suppose a digital watch from around 1980 was my first wearable. I remember it well - it had an alarm that played "Dixie" in electronic tones.

I thought it was cool at the time, and I played that little tune over and over with a press of a button.

Now I realize I was likely annoying my parents.

I ditched my Seiko watch when cellphones got small enough to keep in my pocket.

Lately I've been wearing an Apple Watch, but more for the smartwatch features (email, texts, calendars) than for fitness.

For the last week I've been wearing the Microsoft Band 2 (\$249.99, microsoft.com), which, as the name suggests, is Microsoft's second-generation wearable.

There's a lot to like about the Band 2, but there are also a few head scratchers.

The Band 2 is a fitness band that wants to be a smartwatch - or is it a smartwatch that wants to be a fitness band?

It certainly has the credentials to be a great fitness band, with 11 sensors, including an optical heart rate sensor; three-axis accelerometer; gyrometer; GPS; ambient light, skin temperature and UV sensors; capacitive sensor; galvanic skin response sensor; a barometer; and a microphone.

The important ones to notice, for me at least, are GPS, UV and barometer.

The built-in GPS means you can map your run or cycling trip with the Band 2 and leave your phone at home. The trip info will be saved to the Band's internal memory and synced to the phone when it's back in range.

The UV sensor can tell you when you should apply sunscreen and the barometer can track how many flights of stairs you climb each day.

The Band itself looks small, but its design is semi-rigid and kind of clunky.

The AMOLED display is 12.8 mm high and 32 mm wide. The screen is curved, but the band under the screen is entirely rigid, as is the clasp, which houses the battery and several sensors.

It took a while before I found a comfortable position to wear the Band 2, which for me was with the screen on the inside of my wrist.

Microsoft says the Band 2 was designed to be worn with the screen on top (like a traditional watch) or inside the wrist. The pulse sensor works in either orientation.

Either way you wear it, the Band 2 feels big on your wrist, and it makes typing a bit irritating, as either the glass of the screen or the metal clasp means you'll need to slightly reposition your wrist.

Speaking of the clasp: Closing the clasp with one hand was a challenge, and the clasp's adjustable track makes an audible click-click as you tighten it around your wrist. It reminded me of a set of handcuffs, which was a bit troubling.

Let's just say its not nearly as comfortable to wear as my Apple Watch.

The Band 2 is powered by a lithium-ion battery that goes about 48 hours between charges, which is done with a proprietary USB cable, magnetically connected to the clasp.

If you use the GPS daily for your workout, you're likely to be charging it daily. Microsoft says a full charge takes less than 90 minutes.

The Band 2 syncs to your Windows, Android or iPhone via Bluetooth. The sync process also uploads your Band's data to Microsoft's Health website, where it's visible on a helpful dashboard.

FUNCTIONALITY

The Band 2 is oriented horizontally and has two buttons. The larger button is for turning the display on or off, and the smaller button is for telling the Band when you are starting and stopping a workout or sleep session.

The different workouts sections are called tiles. You can add or remove tiles from the smartphone app.

Available tiles include:

Messaging: Shows your latest text messages from the connected smartphone.

Mail: Shows your latest email messages.

Calls: Shows call history, including missed calls and voicemail notification.

Calendar: Shows your upcoming appointments.

These tiles work with all compatible smartphones, but there is increased functionality for Windows phone users.

For instance, while I could read incoming texts from my iPhone, if I had a Windows phone, I could answer back using a small onscreen keyboard.

There are tiles to start workouts for running, biking and golf and one for generic "exercise."

You'll use the buttons to mark the beginning and end of each workout.

You'll also be asked if you'd like to use GPS. This is quite handy, because you likely do want to use it for outdoor biking or running, but don't want to use GPS if you're on a stationary bike or running on a treadmill.

You can also access preset workout sessions from Gold's Gym, Muscle & Fitness, Men's Fitness and more.

You can browse from more than 100 preset workouts and sync them to the Band 2 to complete when you're ready.

The Band 2 can also send data to third-party fitness and health apps like LoseIt!, RunKeeper, myfitnesspa and Strava.

There are other tiles to tell you the weather, keep track of stock prices, see your latest Facebook or Twitter notifications and even pay for your purchases at Starbucks.

SLEEP TRACKING

I was most intrigued by the Band 2's sleep tracking function.

You call up the sleep tile when you're in bed and press the small button to tell the Band 2 you're going to sleep.

The sensors in the Band 2 keep track of your heart rate and movement to measure your total time asleep, how many times you woke up, how much time you spent in restful sleep and in light sleep, and your resting heart rate.

The app also tells you how long it took you to fall asleep and shows you on a graph the quality of your sleep and each time you woke up.

I find the sleep tracking fascinating, although I'm not sure it's entirely scientific, as it's movement-based.

One night I forgot to tell the band I was going to bed, but I found out later the band did track my sleep that night.

It seems there's automatic sleep detection, but Microsoft warns that if you're inactive for at least two hours, perhaps reading a book, your inactivity might be mistaken for sleep.

The sleep tracker also has an alarm that can wake you in a period of light sleep, so you are more refreshed and less groggy.

You tell the app when you want to wake, and it'll choose the right time in the preceding half-hour to wake you up.

It worked well for me.

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, I liked the functionality of the Band 2 for fitness tracking. If I used a Windows phone, I'd appreciate the smartwatch functions a bit more. But I'm still partial to my Apple Watch for daily wear and use.

The Band 2's form factor of the screen and clasp is a bit clumsy to wear all day, every day, but for workouts and [sleep](#), I'd recommend it.

It's a great fitness tracker. Not so comfortable as a smartwatch.

—

Pros: Quite a complete health tracker. Tons of sensors.

Cons: Wouldn't call it comfortable to wear all day.

Bottom line: If you like to work out, this is as nice a fitness tracker as you'd ever want.

©2015 The Dallas Morning News

Distributed by Tribune Content Agency, LLC.

Citation: Review: Is Microsoft Band 2 a smartwatch or fitness band? (2015, December 23)
retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-12-microsoft-band-smartwatch.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--