

Tech review: Samsung Note 3, Gear smart watch were made for each other

October 17 2013, by Jim Rossman



There have been several entries into the smart watch market lately but none with the pedigree of Samsung's Galaxy Gear (\$300).

The Gear is a pretty interesting watch, but it comes with an expensive catch - it works only with one [phone](#), the Samsung Galaxy Note 3.

Without the Note 3, the watch can't even tell time, much less do any of its fancier tricks.

Oh, and the Gear does a few very nice tricks and holds the promise for more.

Today we're looking at the Gear and the Note 3. Thanks to AT&T for loaning the Gear and Samsung for the Note 3.

NOTE 3: The Galaxy Note 3 (\$700 without a contract; contract prices vary with terms) is the latest in a line of very large phones known for having their own stylus, the S Pen, and a suite of pen-input applications.

The first thing you notice about the Note 3 is the brilliant 5.7-inch HD Super AMOLED display with a resolution of 1,920 by 1,080 pixels.

Under the hood is a 2.3 GHz quad-core Qualcomm processor with 3 gigabytes of RAM, up to 32 gigabytes of storage, and a microSD card slot that can house an extra 64 GB.

Providing power is a 3,200-milliamp-hour battery good for 25 hours of talk time and up to 22 days of standby time.

Radios inside include 4G LTE, Bluetooth 4.0, Wi-Fi and NFC, and it can act as a mobile hotspot for up to eight devices.

The main camera has a 13-megapixel sensor and can shoot 1,080p HD video. The front-facing camera's sensor is 2 megapixels.

If you're the type of person who carries a Moleskin notebook in your pocket, you owe it to yourself to check out the Note 3. The S Note app alone will be quite appealing.

All in all, the Note 3 is a nice bump from the Note 2 and is the king of phablets, in my opinion.

GEAR SMART WATCH: So what is a smart watch? The definition is a moving target, and I'm guessing we'll keep rewriting that definition until Apple's rumored watch enters the market, if it ever does.

Once you unbox the watch and put it in its cradle to charge, you have to download the Gear Manager app to your Note 3.

You initiate the Gear Manager download by touching the phone to the cradle, which is pretty slick.

The software download is quick, and the watch and phone pretty much pair themselves after you touch the OK button on a few screens.

So what can the Gear do?

Its home screen tells time and can also display current weather, a few app icons, your pedometer step total or your next calendar appointment. There are a few analog-looking watch faces as well.

The watch face's screen is 1.6 inches square and is housed in a metal bezel with a semi-flexible rubber band that's not changeable by the user.

The Gear is water-resistant, and it's pretty big - the watch itself is more than 2 inches long and about as thick as a pencil.

Navigating on the Gear is done with the swipe of a finger.

Swipe to the left or right from the home screen to access the watch's apps, which largely overlap with phone apps such as contacts, phone call logs, pedometer, photo albums, notifications, voice memos, a media

controller (to control music playing from the phone) and a few others.

There are a few other swipes for some more fun features.

You swipe down from the top of the watch screen to activate the Gear's 2-megapixel camera. The camera lens is built-into the semi-flexible rubber watch band.

The camera isn't going to replace any other camera you own, but for quick snapshots, it'll do. It also isn't hiding. The lens is larger than the diameter of a pencil and is quite visible.

The pictures are stored in the watch's 4 GB of storage. You can also transfer them to the camera. The picture transfer can be manual or automatic.

You swipe up from the bottom of the screen to bring up the phone dialer.

The phone features of the Gear are by far the coolest.

You can place and answer phone calls from the watch. The watch is basically a Bluetooth headset.

The speaker and microphone are housed in the watch band's buckle.

Incoming callers were easy to understand, and outgoing calls sounded on par with some of the better Bluetooth headsets I've used. Calls from the watch and from the Note 3's speakerphone sounded pretty much the same.

Conversations sound fine even while the Gear wearer is driving. The volume of the watch's speaker is good, but gets better if you face the tiny

speaker toward your ears.

There are a few other features, like the ability to see incoming text messages and reply to them with S Voice dictation. You can also use the watch to locate the phone and use the phone to locate the watch if you ever lose one or the other.

Developers are starting to release Gear apps, including Evernote, SnapChat, Glympse, MyFitnessPal and Path.

Overall, the Gear smart watch is a good first swing by Samsung.

The phone and camera features operate as I'd hope they would. I'd love to see video calling (yes, like Dick Tracy) and video playback and perhaps some Web browsing or reading in future models.

The Samsung people say they're working on making a few more phones compatible with the Gear. Of course they'll open up to more customers when Galaxy S3, S4 and Note 2 users can get in on the fun. CNet.com is reporting that those models will be supported by the end of the year.

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SAMSUNG GALAXY NOTE 3 AND GEAR WATCH:

-Pros: Watch and phone are easy to pair. A few nice features so far.

-Cons: Limited phone compatibility. A bit expensive.

-Bottom line: Not a bad first try, but I'd wait for a bit more application development or version 2 of the Gear before springing for one.

-Price: Note, \$700 without a contract; Gear, \$300

-On the Web: samsung.com

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