…But for the benefit of the uninitiated, the Watch connects to your iPhone, and is effectively impotent without it. It uses that wireless umbilical connection to display any notification from your phone, flashing up anything from texts to WhatsApp messages, tweets, Instagram likes, Gmail alerts, calendar reminders, annoying SkyBet notifications and pointless push messages.

You can trim notifications and stop the less relevant ones from being displayed on your watch using the iPhone companion app, so in some way there is a filter. However, you can't dig further in and only allow messages from certain people or conversations onto the wrist.

You can also make calls from the Watch (the leg work done by your paired iPhone, although you'd never know) and reply to messages using your voice.

Other key features include tracking steps, standing time and daily activity, prompts to remind you to stand up regularly, and of course, the tracking of sports.

In short, Apple has built in all the features you'd expect from a smartwatch and let its developers create the experiences that give the Watch the opportunity to define the market. So far so good, but does it do those core things well, how good are its apps, and is it the best smartwatch to date?

This is where the test really begins.

**Apple Watch: UI and interface**

The joy of Apple's previous successful products, and the reason it's been so successful is simplicity. Your mum can use the iPhone. Your three year old can rack up thousands of dollars in micro-payments. It's so easy to use.

The Apple Watch? Not so much.

To conserve battery the screen turns off when the watch isn't in use. This is a common feature most smartwatches, but unfortunately, Apple hasn't nailed the gesture of turning on the screen when needed. It works okay when standing, but if you're sitting or lying down, the watch often fails to illuminate, which is pretty frustrating.

The long and short is that sometimes it's difficult to tell the time.

The control system also takes getting used to. The watch face is the main screen, as you'd expect and a tap on the Digital Crown takes you to that iconic spread of apps – just like the home button on the iPhone. You twiddle the crown oh so gently to zoom in and out of those apps.

***Must have extras:***[*Best Apple Watch accessories*](http://www.wareable.com/apple-watch/best-apple-watch-accessories-953)

Within apps, you can scroll through options and lists using your finger or the crown, and you tap to make choices. A long press (Force Touch) will bring up a context menu – it's a feature that's been lauded on the Apple Watch, but frankly has been a part of Android for years.

Using the Apple Watch requires a deft touch. The more apps you have, the more cluttered your screen will be, and that it requires concentration to hit the right one. Your finger will never feel so large and ungainly when trying to pick out that app you need. There's also strange lack of standardisation across the apps. Some have a long press option, some don't.

The most useful information is held in the Glances section, which is accessed by swiping up from the bottom when you're on the watch face screen. Here you can see battery life, calendar alerts, progress towards move goals among other things. You have to swipe through the cards to find the one you need, which can be a bit of a faff. What's more, if you're in the apps screen, you have to return to the watch face to use your Glances. Annoying. However, you can add or remove Glances and reorder them from within the iPhone companion app.

**Apple Watch: Notifications**

When notifications land on the watch, they're stored in a list, just like on the iPhone. Swiping down from the top enables you to recall them, and tapping one will open it up in full.

***Smartwatch showdown:***[*Apple Watch v Android Wear*](http://www.wareable.com/smartwatches/android-wear-vs-apple-watch-2015)

This works well, but again, there's discrepancies in notifications. For all the 3,000 apps made for Watch, there are no dedicated ones (yet) for Facebook, Gmail or WhatsApp. That means for some notifications – Facebook in particular – alerts just tell you something has happened. Gmail and WhatsApp messages can be read, at least in part, but you can't read messages in full or reply.

More on that later.

While Apple has nailed the relatively easy task of getting notifications to your wrist, it does lag behind Google when it comes to preempting the information you need. We missed Google Now's cards, prompting you to go to your meeting, or telling you there's disruption on your way to work without you having to check manually.

**Apple Watch: Taptic engine**

One of the triumphs of the Apple Watch's design is the Taptic engine, which enables a different feeling for notifications. Rather than just buzz when notifications come through, the Apple Watch uses a series of different digital taps.

A notification feels like someone tapping your arm, rather than a dull buzz. And there's different feelings depending on the type of alert: left and right turns during walking navigation, move goals, standing prompts and of course Digital Touch. The latter is Apple's feature enables you to send heartbeats, sketches and taps to other Watch users – which is obviously a gimmick, but good fun for your first day with the Watch.

***See also:***[*Apple Watch v Pebble Time*](http://www.wareable.com/smartwatches/pebble-time-v-apple-watch-the-iphone-compatible-smartwatch-fight)

The reality is however, that the Taptic engine is a huge part of the experience, and makes the watch feel so much more personal. The taps are much more pleasant to experience than a series of motorised buzzes you'll find on every other smartwatch out there, and it's the Watch's best example of that hallmark of Apple quality we've come to expect.

**Apple Watch: Fitness, sports and heart rate**

A big push for the Apple Watch is in fitness and sports, and Apple has been keen to market the device to the millions who are interested in fitness trackers and sports watches.

As a general fitness tracker that counts steps and pushes you to your daily goals, the Apple Watch superb. The built in Activity app is one of the best we've seen in terms of design, and you can look at results on the Watch and iPhone app quickly and easily. Progress towards your Move Goal is clearly shown by coloured circles – one for standing time, one for activity and the other for movement.

***Sports watch showdown:***[*Apple Watch v Fitbit Surge*](http://www.wareable.com/smartwatches/apple-watch-v-fitbit-surge-2015-super-watch-showdown)

Unlike a Fitbit, the 'move goal' is measured in calorific burn rather than the number of steps, which is a sensible move, as it rewards you for getting out for a short run or more intense bursts of activity. You can change your goal from the Watch, and set a higher number of calories to try to burn off.

There's no sleep tracking built into the Apple Watch, presumably because you need to charge it nightly, but there are already third party apps in the App Store ready to fill this void.

While the Apple Watch is certainly somewhat of a Fitbit-killer, it's far from a complete sports watch.

Firstly, there's no GPS, which is a problem. You cannot accurately track runs without it. However, the Apple Watch can steal GPS data when running with an iPhone, so if you're willing to take both out, you're good to go.

Of course, there's hundreds of running apps for iPhone, and more on that shortly, but the Apple Watch has its own Workout app, that tracks runs, cycles, walks, indoor gym work and free exercise. When you start a session, the Watch will keep tabs on your heart rate, pace, distance and time, just as a running watch would do.

Sadly, the app is just awful on every level.

Firstly, when we tested it against the [Garmin Fenix 3](http://www.wareable.com/gps-running-watch/garmin-fenix-3-review) on our usual running route, it was consistently short. Every mile we ran registered as 0.91 on the Apple Watch's app, and the pace was always totally wide of the mark – in short, it was completely useless.

What's more, when you finish your run, it provides a simple text summary of the workout, but without any maps of your route, graphs of your heart rate zones, breakdowns of your pace. It's beyond basic.

Perhaps it's only aimed at the casual runner, the absolute beginner, but no-one wants wrong information. It's counter-productive, frustrating, and to be honest, potentially dangerous.

To illustrate the fact of how totally unfit for purpose the Apple Watch's Workout app is, we turned on a free workout, and sat at our desk for an hour. It reported that we'd burned 600 calories.

That said, the only really accurate part of our run tracking was the heart rate data, which stacked up against a Garmin chest strap admirably. While neither are scientifically accurate, both came back with similar data.

**Apple Watch: Apps**

Apple's selection of apps will arguably make or break the Apple Watch, and like so many products before it, Apple has provided a platform for developers to run with. Albeit with limitations. There are no 'dedicated' Apple Watch apps, simply extensions to existing iPhone apps.

The 3,000 launch apps lineup is missing some big names, as mentioned, but there are already some fascinating apps. The SpyWatch game is fun – even if it doesn't quite work properly. CityMapper is another favourite, and we loved the Glance card to show London travel disruption, yet it has its own problems.

***Our top picks:***[*The best Apple Watch apps*](http://www.wareable.com/apple-watch/best-apple-watch-apps-832)

Unfortunately it seems that Apple Watch apps are not made equal. Apple based apps work well on the Watch, and third party ones simply don't.

An example is Apple Map's walking directions, which use the Taptic engine to guide, which is a genuine wow moment. And despite the Workout app being flawed, it stays illuminated so you can check your run stats on the go.

On the other hand, CityMapper directions don't update live on the Watch screen and if you accidentally tap on the map shown within the app, you're whisked off to the Apple Maps app, with no way to return.

That isn't an isolated incident, and apps like Runkeeper – which basically just fire up the iPhone app and provide a mirrored display of the data – suffer the ignominy of the screen turning off and disappearing off into the background while running. A double tap of the Digital Crown will retrieve it.

We're not slamming Apple's app selection here – we're sure that in a few weeks, there will be every app imaginable in the Store. But most apps we tried sort of sucked. And we can't guarantee when they're going to get better.

**Apple Watch: Siri and calling**

Like Android Wear, voice is a big part of the Apple Watch, and of course, Siri is on-board. You press and hold the Digital Crown to summon Siri, and then ask questions, schedule meetings and the like. It works well, and the voice recognition works a treat – although the movement of bringing your Watch closer to your mouth can annoyingly dismiss Siri again.

Voice calling from the Apple Watch is also impressive, and in our test calls, recipients had no idea the call was made from the Watch. The only complaint was that the built-in speaker wasn't loud enough, which made calls in the car – an ideal time to use the Watch – hard to hear.

However, it's supremely easy to make a call by using the second button that brings up your regular contacts – and in select situations, wrist calling can be genuinely useful.

**Apple Watch: Battery life**

Battery life has been widely panned on the Apple Watch, and of course, it depends on your expectations. Definitively, the battery life is one single day. In our testing we had no problems getting through the day, and generally went to bed with at least 20% of charge remaining.

However, that means taking your proprietary charger everywhere. What's more, we're surprised that Apple didn't opt to integrate iPhone charging somehow, perhaps with a double USB plug. Now we must use up another socket next to the bed for the extra device, which could have been avoided with a little consideration.

**Apple Watch: Should you buy it?**

For anyone to buy a first generation Apple product, you have to be a big enthusiast with money to burn – and the Apple Watch is no exception. If you're looking for the best smartwatch, this is certainly a front-runner along with the Sony SmartWatch 3, which boasts great sports features, the best of Android Wear but a distinct lack of X-factor.

***Read this:***[*The best Android Wear smartwatch you can buy*](http://www.wareable.com/smartwatches/best-android-watch)

Sports fans should avoid the Apple Watch for now, or risk serious disappointment, but if you love your iPhone and want some of the best looking wearable tech on offer today – the Apple Watch is for you.

**Apple Watch (summary)**

While the Apple Watch does a lot right, the battery life and usability issues show the company couldn't quite muster up a miracle of smartwatch design. However, there's no excuse for the poor sports features, the lack of GPS and the worrying quality of early third party apps shows Apple has much work still to do. Fix this, and it's a four star smartwatch. What Apple has achieved is genuine wearability, and despite its flaws, the Apple Watch could be the first wearable that's actually a pleasure to wear.

Hit

* A pleasure to wear
* Great straps
* Good app selection
* Taptic engine is a revelation

Miss

* Fitness features are useless
* Third party apps poor
* Battery life is minimal
* Expensive