



Tech Talk

The Apple Watch – part 1 ©

by John McCarthy

Hello and welcome once again to Tech Talk. Well, after all the hype and bustle, since Friday April 10th you can at last preorder your Apple watch – yes, that’s the official name, not the iWatch, although I reckon iWatch is how most customers will refer to it. This is the company’s first foray into the sectors of wearable technology and fashion. The product itself will be available as from April 24th.

And so, what is the nature of the beast? There’ll be 38 different combinations of watch and strap to choose from, and three editions in all: the entry level ‘Watch Sport’, with an anodized aluminium case and a starting price of €399; then the stainless steel ‘Watch’ which ramps up the price a little bit; and finally the ‘Watch Edition’, Apple’s flagship model with a mind-numbing entry price of €11,000. For that you get an admittedly very attractive 18 carat gold casing in yellow or rose. The watch face comes in two sizes: 38 or 42mm, and the glass is different depending on which model you opt for: strengthened ion-x glass for the ‘bottom range’ model, which should be able to withstand knocks and bumps, and sapphire crystal for the mid and top range.

While not exactly hydrophobic, Apple doesn’t recommend submerging the Watch in deep water. The company describes its product as being “splash and water resistant, but not waterproof”. The CEO apparently uses it in the shower, but if you’re a potential buyer you’ll also have to bear in mind that while the plastic straps are fine for damp conditions, the more expensive leather ones aren’t waterproof.

With regard to technology, it doesn’t matter how much you spend as each model comes with the same innards: a custom-designed chip called the S1, pre-packaged software and an 8 GB storage, where you’ll be able to transfer your photos (limited to 75 MB for the time being) and listen to your favourite tunes, albeit through Bluetooth headphones, as there is no headphone port in the Apple Watch.

It’s claimed that battery life lasts about 18 hours on a typical day, with typical usage – whatever that means – and reviewers lucky enough to get their mitts on the product before its initial release have confirmed this. Charging the watch completely takes 2 and a half hours and this is done via a magnetic device that snaps onto the back; the inductive charger is included in the price, and it probably won’t be cheap if you’d like a second one for the office or are unlucky enough to lose or break it.

A smartwatch wouldn't be smart without apps, so the Apple includes quite a few, notably Messages, which will let you read texts, Mail will alert you when you get an e-mail, and then you can read and delete it, but you won't be able to reply unless you switch to another device, as for instance an iPhone or iPad. There's also Calendar, which is self-explanatory. By using a couple of incorporated sensors, including a gyroscope and an accelerometer, Activity will track your movements, the exercise you take and how long you've been sitting down – reminding you to stand up if you haven't done so for a while. Workout monitors your sessions and shows time, speed and calories burnt – and there will, of course be other third-party fitness-tracker apps, the most notable of which are, for the time being, Runtastic and Nike+Running. Maps uses custom vibrations to guide you to your destination; Passbook will show airline tickets and barcodes to allow access; there's also Weather and Stocks not to mention the ubiquitous social media must-haves such as – in no particular order – Instagram, Facebook and Twitter.

As for the Operating System, using the Apple Watch is quite intuitive. One way is to use the touch screen – scrolling around, tapping on items to select, pressing harder to access contextual menus. The force-technology determines how hard you press and acts accordingly. There are familiar gestures for product users that will bring up other elements of the OS, such as swiping upwards. And here, some users may face a few inconveniences, because while scrolling is smooth and responsive, the plethora of swipes, presses and taps will necessitate a steep learning-curve for many users, and might of course prove a very difficult hurdle for those with thicker fingers.

The device also comprises a digital crown which lets you navigate around without covering the screen with your finger. Tapping or rotating it will move you through the interface. What's very practical: tapping the crown will take you to the home screen and provide immediate access to apps.

Last, but by no means least, the 64 million dollar question: is it actually any good at telling the time? I think we can rest assured on this: while it doesn't have the handcrafted motion of a Rolex, through technology it offers a precision that just wouldn't be attainable with a traditional timepiece, regardless of price. Moreover, when daylight saving time begins or ends, the Watch will spring forward or backward to the correct time, and also adjust the time accordingly when moving into different time zones, thereby obviating the need for any strenuous digital manipulations.

That's it for today; join me next time when we'll be looking at some of the reasons why the Apple Watch might be a game changer or not. We'll be looking at the pros and cons of owning this product. Will it be as successful as the iPhone, or will it go the way of the Apple Newton or Sinclair C5?

Thank you for listening to Tech Talk on EnglishWaves.