

Apple Watch is a dud By Paul Boutros

I am a passionate collector of vintage watches, a rare-watch consultant to auctioneer Phillips, and a reviewer of contemporary mechanical watches for Barron's Penta. I also love technology, which is why, out of curiosity, I bought the \$399 Apple Watch Sport 42mm. Was this really, as some fanatically claimed, the timepiece that will upend the market for costly mechanical watches? Before my smack-down of Apple (ticker: AAPL), let me disclose that you'll find multiple MacBooks, iPads, Apple TVs, and Apple Wi-Fi routers in my home. **I appreciate the simplicity, quality, and luxurious feel of Apple products, which is why I strapped the timepiece on, eager to reach my own conclusion.**

The watch came with a Sport Band, a bright blue strap made of an inert rubber material called fluoroelastomer. Its "pin and tuck" closure was actually first seen on Ikepod watches made in the 1990s, a firm co-founded by Marc Newson, also a principal designer of the Apple Watch. **Strapping the band on is a chore,** requiring dexterous finger maneuvers to properly fit the pin. I tried buying a better strap from an Apple Store, but, like the watches, they can only be purchased online, so I was stuck with what I had as I flew to Geneva on a business trip.

Configuring the Apple Watch was not at all intuitive for me. A bug quickly showed up where notifications—alerts such as text messages received by my phone that should have been immediately sent to the watch—weren't coming through. My sophisticated Swiss friends were unimpressed as I fumbled around trying to show off the watch's features. Frustrated and without time to figure things out, I took it off and placed it in a suit pocket, where it remained unused for the rest of my trip.

Back at home, I gave the watch another chance, out of respect for Apple, and found that it requires patience and training to master. This is not a watch for everyone. **I'm an engineer** and devoted time to watching Apple's tutorial videos, learning an all-new gesture they call "force touch," where pressing down on the watch's Ion-X crystal triggers a menu, allowing you to change the timekeeping face. I chose one titled Utility, customizing it to show the battery life, current temperature, date, and upcoming calendar events. Online research further revealed that many other users weren't getting their text notifications, either. Once I reset several settings, the notifications finally began working as intended.

Once I had the hang of it, the Apple Watch had to co-exist with the mechanical watches I so love. The old-school watches got prime placement on my left wrist and the Apple Watch, on my right. An Apple app setting configures it for left or right wrist wear, with the position of the silky-smooth digital crown matched accordingly. Pressing the crown reveals all apps installed on the watch, while turning it zooms in on the apps and allows you to quickly scroll up and down within an app. It's difficult to quickly find an app of interest, and once found, such as the Workout app, it takes practice to get it doing what you want, which in this case was - measuring my heart rate. Most of the apps won't work without an iPhone connection and then are agonizingly slow to load.

The watch's haptic notifications —strong vibrations alerting you to incoming messages, alarms, or phone calls—are perhaps its most useful feature. They're difficult to ignore, especially as the iPhone in my pocket vibrated in sync. During meetings, I couldn't resist compulsively turning the watch toward my face with each alert—as distracting to my colleagues as constantly looking at an iPhone. Other features such as activity monitoring and heart-rate measurement capability, while interesting, simply aren't relevant to my lifestyle. **Just telling the time takes getting used to. You have to deliberately and indiscreetly raise the watch toward your face for the screen to display the time. On occasion, it fails to wake up.** When it works, its responsiveness is not immediate, even after a major software update was installed. In bright sunlight, the screen is difficult to see. Thankfully, the mechanical watch on my left wrist was always there to provide me the correct time at a glance.

With a traditional watch on one wrist and an iPhone always with me, I struggled to find a compelling use for my Apple Watch. **The slow app performance, the draining of my iPhone's precious battery during the necessary tethering between the two devices, and having to charge the watch every night, made it a gadget whose novelty quickly wore off.**

After several weeks of trying to fit it into my life, I found it redundant and too much of a hassle, and wonder how sales of the watch will hold up over time. Still, out of brand loyalty, I'll probably take a look at the Apple Watch 2 when it comes out.