



The Forerunner 201 is one fun gadget. Even though it is the size of a breadbasket, it doesn't weigh you down. It's amazingly light though it does resemble something Spock would wear when checking out planet elements on Star Trek. Because of the size, I do feel a little conspicuous when I'm running in the neighborhoods, but the fun offsets that feeling.

What you get with the 201 is a big easy-to-read display and an integrated GPS sensor. Providing you're not surrounded by thick trees or big buildings, the GPS will show your pace and distance, among many other things. And, the really good thing is it's extremely easy to figure out. I have a Polar heart rate monitor watch, too, and I flunked the instruction test several times. But not with the Forerunner. You almost don't need to read the instructions before using it.

One of the features I really like is the virtual training partner. This feature allows you to set your Virtual Partner's pace and distance. When you get ready to run, start the watch and a little figure will be displayed on the Forerunner's display, representing your virtual partner, and another figure will represent you. By seeing the position of the two "runners" will let you know if you're ahead or behind your partner (thus your pace). In other words, if you set the virtual partner for an 8-minute per mile pace and you're running at an 8:30 pace, it will show that you are behind the training partner and how many seconds or minutes you're behind. Pretty neat.

After each run (there are other modes as well for biking and walking), you can download the information into a free program from Garmin that you save to your computer. After downloading, you can analyze your run. The program, the Garmin Training Center, will show the elevation changes in the course, will show an outline of the course your ran, your pace per mile and your overall speed and distance.

From Garmin's website, here is a list of Forerunner 201 features:

- GPS sensor provides precise latitude, longitude, and altitude data for exact location information.
- Mark specific locations, and then look-up and navigate to these points using an electronic map.
- Retrace your steps to a starting point or reverse your normal route for routine variation.
- Amount of calories burned can be tracked and calculated over the course of a workout.
- Lap history—such as lap time, lap distance, and average pace—can be stored for up to two years.
- Performance data can be automatically archived and calculated to provide an accurate record.
- Automated stopwatch provides auto-lap and auto-pause features.

- Lap timer indicates when a certain speed is reached or when you've fallen below a pre-set level.
- Pace whistle sounds alert when you begin traveling slower or faster than your desired pace.
- Distance whistle sounds when you reach a specified duration or distance in your workout.
- Download free Garmin software to transfer data from your Forerunner 201 to your PC for storage and analysis.

The only negative about the 201 is what affects most GPS systems. Sometimes the satellite signals won't be picked up because of trees, buildings, clouds, etc. A few times when that has happened to me, the GPS tries to catch up by giving you some funky numbers. For example, when I was out on a slow, long run, it showed I had run one of my miles in about 6:30. However, the next mile took me about 12 minutes. And I was going the same pace. My Virtual Partner was complaining, but I was having too much fun to notice. Of course, as with any computer-related gizmo, this is outdated. Garmin has a new 205 that is smaller and apparently better at improving signal reception. For now, the 201 will have to do.