

A Garmin Forerunner is possibly the best gadget for runners

By Charles Clines



There are several gadgets, or tools, for runners, including heart rate monitors, parachutes, speed harness, speed sled, pedometers, etc. However, the one I like the most and get more use out of is a Garmin Forerunner. If you or someone you know doesn't have one, I'd recommend one for Christmas. If you're like me, you're still shopping and looking for something special.

I have an older Forerunner, the 201, and it reminds me of something Spock would wear on Star Trek when he's monitoring the air on some alien planet. But I like it, nevertheless.

So, what's so neat about a Forerunner? Well, it has a GPS so you can track your distance and pace, it has a virtual running partner that goes at a pace you determine and shows you whether you're keeping up or falling behind, and it has functions that allow you to measure your distance in miles or kilometers, among other things.

One of the features I like is the free software that allows you to download your run to your computer. This feature allows you to see charts on the course you ran, the altitudes, the distance and your pace at different segments of the course. You can store the individual runs so you can compare your training at various times. And, if you cycle, walk, etc., you also can set the watch to reflect those sports rather than running.

Some of the newer models, which are smaller, also include a heart rate monitor, better GPS receiver, and you can have your running data analyzed with www.motionbased.com to provide online mapping and route sharing. And even though the newer models are smaller, the displays are easy to read, though maybe not as easy as mine. However, Garmin says the resolution is better, so the displays are crisper.

The Forerunner allows you to define how much data you want displayed during a training run. and , with the ones that have a heart rate monitor, allows you to set target zones and alerts.

I have tried training with heart rate monitors before, and had mixed results. The trouble I found with heart rate monitors is that temperature and hills greatly affect your rate, as you would expect. Thus, on a warm day and training over a hilly course, I was sometimes are down to a walk to maintain my desired heart rate. So, sometimes, I just ignored the monitor, which probably defeated the purpose, but I never felt that my long, slow runs should be a walk.

So, I gave up on the heart rate monitor and replaced it with the Forerunner, if nothing else but for the GPS. Though a GPS isn't exact, it's close enough and by monitoring the distance, you can pick a new route anytime you want.

Interested? Then click on the link on the right and choose either that Forerunner or search for another. If you're getting one as a present, your running buddy will thank you.