

**Technophile
Technology**

• This article is more than **12 years old**

Review

Review: Pebble's smart watch doesn't try too hard - but does what you need

★★★★☆

Born in a Kickstarter campaign that raised over \$10m in a month, Pebble's watch is wearable computing made real. Cleverly, the designers make sure it does a few things really well



Charles Arthur

Tue 21 May 2013 11.03
EDT



• The Pebble smart watch, showing three designs and different downloadable watch 'faces'

Nowadays, when my phone rings, my wrist buzzes. When someone texts me, I don't look at my phone to find out what they said; I look at my watch.

Why? I've got a Pebble - the "smartwatch" launched on Kickstarter last year which hit its \$100,000 target within *two hours* and had raised \$10.2m from nearly 69,000 backers by the time it closed in May 2012 after a month. (I was one of those backers, with my own money.) So far, according to the site, it's delivered 85,000 of its watches, each costing \$150 (£98). Yes, it's this year's buzzword, **wearable computing**, but you don't have to genuflect to Google or splash out \$1,000 to get it. Plus it's unobtrusive.

Pebble describes it as an "E-paper watch for iPhone and Android". The "e-paper" bit might get some thinking you're going to be reading books on it. You're definitely not (the screen's only 1.26in - 3.2cm - diagonally). But it is great fun.

So what do you then get for your money? It's a watch, to start with. The face is 144x168 pixels, a large black/white e-paper display. I chose the black body and strap (you can get it in black, white, cherry red or grey). Open the box, and you're instructed to go to getpebble.com. That's a neat touch - no manual at all. The whole initial setup is done through its web page and then app.

Open that page on your smartphone, and it directs you to the iPhone or Android app store, where you download a free app which connects via Bluetooth. Through that, you can send software updates (such as new watchfaces) and, more usefully, back-and-forth notifications when someone

Most viewed



Doctor who lost job over 'regrettable' Texas flood post says sorry



Awkward silence after Trump praises English of Liberian president - video



Landmark ruling finds Russia shot down MH17 with 298 people on board

calls or texts. (You can also set it to notify you when you get an email. Don't do this unless you never get email.)

The watchface is scratch-resistant (not -proof) and has an anti-glare coat; I find it very readable in all lights, except when it's dark. Then you have the options of an automatic backlight (adjusted to light levels), or being able to flick your wrist to activate the backlight. The strap feels like rubber; it's wide (to go with the watch) but not uncomfortable.

Charging is via a USB lead terminating in a magnetic attachment to a pair of contacts on the left-hand side of the watch; I assume a micro-USB slot would have taken up too much internal space and created waterproofing problems (it is **waterproof, at least for swimming**). So don't lose that charger; you'll be needing it every four or five days (in my limited experience, though the makers claim up to seven.. probably if you have Bluetooth off) and it's unique.

One bad thing: the interface doesn't show the battery level (even in the phone app), which can leave you in the lurch without warning. The charge level only shows when you're charging, and even then only in the menu, as opposed to standard watch, display.



📷 Pebble watch: note the control buttons on the side.

The controls are pleasingly simple. There's a large rectangular button on the left-hand side which takes you back up a level of control; press it enough times and you'll reach the time display, which is the default.

On the right are three buttons (one large, one small, one large) which function as "up, choose, down" for scrolling through menus. Pebble doesn't try to do a lot of things. You turn on the Bluetooth, connect it to your phone, and that's mostly it. You can control the music playback on your phone via the right-hand buttons (it shows the artist, album and track name, though not album art; the buttons will advance a track, play/pause, skip back). However, that's really a party piece; unless you're on the other side of the room, it's simpler just to pull out your phone or, on headphones with a mic, click the control button, than to press the two buttons required to change the music. And yes, running Bluetooth will use some phone battery - perhaps 5% over a normal day. Turn it off, and the Pebble still works as a watch.

Next you're expecting a touchscreen with icons and apps, aren't you? No such thing. Pebble's designers have wisely held back from overegging the interaction pudding. The screen isn't touch-sensitive, and you won't be



Live

Judge blocks Trump administration from enforcing birthright citizenship order - US politics live



Trump praises English of the leader of Liberia - where English is the official language

squinting and trying to operate tiny physical or onscreen buttons. (Looking at you, [Sony Smartwatch](#).)

Presently, the on-watch functions are simple: you can set alarms; choose different watchfaces (which you download via the phone app); decide how you want the phone's backlight to come on; and whether you want notifications from your phone on. (You probably do, else it's just a watch). On-watch apps haven't happened yet. But there are fortnightly software updates. It's probably coming.

Notification

It's the notifications that make this stand out. A little bit of configuration on your phone and you can get incoming calls and texts displayed (and emails - only recommended if you never get email). This is the great thing about Pebble: you can figure out whether to ignore a call by looking at the number (if it's in your address book, it'll show up; you can also reject calls from the phone) and you won't miss texts even if your phone is on silent. It's also a lot less intrusive to look at your watch during a meeting than to take out your phone.

Pebble says you can add calendar alerts, Facebook Messages, tweets, and weather alerts to the notifications; I do wonder what sort of weather alert (short of a tornado) you'd want to know about, but in principle it's putting everything just where you want it.

I find that I can read entire text messages on it without trouble, though spotting the name of a caller is harder (perhaps because it feels more urgent to decide).

But phone calls and texts are just the start. Pebble last week released an SDK that will let developers push notifications from third-party apps; think of apps that you'd like to give you updates, but which you don't want to have to keep monitoring your phone for, and you've found a use for the Pebble. It's working on apps for bicyclists, golfers (err...), runners (it syncs with [Runkeeper](#)), and whoever else they can think of. (The [forums are pretty busy](#)

with people suggesting stuff.)

Do I like it? No, I really love it. My wife gives me pitying looks when I try to describe its benefits, but a couple of weeks in the fun hasn't worn off. And the idea that it could connect with more apps (train times? Concert ticket availability? Just think of things you'd like to be quietly notified about) is enticing. If it shipped with those apps and capabilities preinstalled, it would be an instant five-star product.

One galling point: HM Revenue & Customs, eager to generate tax revenue from somewhere (since it can't seem to get big companies to pay), slaps an import tax of £25.06 on each one. That brings the total price for the device to around £125. Crazy? A bit. But I'm convinced that [wearable technology](#) is the future, or at least a significant component of it. And at this price, it's worth it.

Speeds and feeds

Specifications:

- Load apps using Bluetooth
- 144 x 168 pixel display black and white e-paper
- Bluetooth 2.1+ EDR and 4.0 (Low Energy)
- Four buttons
- Vibrating motor (for alerts)
- Three-axis accelerometer with gesture detection

Compatibility: iPhone 2GS, 4, 4S, 5 or any iPod Touch with iOS 5 or iOS 6

Compatibility: iPhone 3GS, 4, 4S, 5 or any iPad Touch with iOS 5 or iOS 6. (iOS 5 and iPhone 3GS have restricted feature sets). Android devices running OS 2.3 and up, including Android 4.0. No support at present for Blackberry, Windows Phone, or Palm phones.

Price: \$150. Customs and shipping charges will apply outside the US.

getpebble.com >>

You've read 7 articles in the last year

Article count on

At this dangerous moment for dissent

I hope you appreciated this article. Before you close this tab, I wanted to ask if you could support the Guardian at this crucial time for journalism in the US.

When the military is deployed to quell overwhelmingly peaceful protest, when elected officials of the opposing party are arrested or handcuffed, when student activists are jailed and deported, and when a wide range of civic institutions - non-profits, law firms, universities, news outlets, the arts, the civil service, scientists - are targeted and penalized by the federal government, it's hard to avoid the conclusion that our core freedoms are disappearing before our eyes - and democracy itself is slipping away.

In any country on the cusp of authoritarianism, the role of the press as an engine of scrutiny, truth and accountability becomes increasingly critical. At the Guardian, we see it as our job not only to report on the suppression of dissenting voices, but to make sure those voices are heard.

Not every news organization sees its mission this way - indeed, some have been pressured by their corporate and billionaire owners to avoid antagonizing this government. I am thankful the Guardian is different.

Our only financial obligation is to fund independent journalism in perpetuity: we have no ultrarich owner, no shareholders, no corporate bosses with the power to overrule or influence our editorial decisions. Reader support is what guarantees our survival and safeguards our independence - and every cent we receive is reinvested in our work.

The Guardian's global perspective helps contextualize and illuminate what we are experiencing in this country. That doesn't mean we have a single viewpoint, but we do have a shared set of values. Humanity, curiosity and honesty guide us, and our work is rooted in solidarity with ordinary people and hope for our shared future.

It has never been more urgent, or more perilous, to pursue reporting in the US that holds power to account and counters the spread of misinformation - and at the Guardian we make our journalism free and accessible to all. Can you spare just 37 seconds now to support our work and protect the free press?

We value whatever you can spare, but a recurring contribution makes the most impact, enabling greater investment in our most crucial, fearless journalism. As our thanks to you, we can offer you some great benefits - including seeing far fewer fundraising messages like this. We've made it

very quick to set up, so we hope you'll consider it. Thank you.

Betsy Reed
Editor, Guardian US



Support \$5/monthly

Support \$15/monthly

Recommended

Support once from just \$1

Unlock **All-access digital** benefits:

Far fewer asks for support

Ad-free reading on all your devices

Unlimited access to the Guardian app

Regular dispatches from the newsroom to see the impact of your support

Unlimited access to the Guardian cooking app, Feast

Continue →

Remind me in August

VISA

MasterCard

AMERICAN EXPRESS

PayPal

More on this story

Samsung Galaxy Note 3 and Note 10.1 review: overflowing with features

5 Sep 2013 104



Samsung unveils Galaxy Gear smartwatch - video

5 Sep 2013



Samsung unveils Galaxy Gear as smartwatch race kicks off

4 Sep 2013 313



Smartwatches: who are Apple, Samsung, Google and Microsoft up to?

2 Sep 2013 262



<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/blog/2013/may/21/pebble-smart-watch-kickstarter>

Page 5 of 6

Petitioner Samsung Ex-1204, 0005