



TEST BENCH

Heart-rate monitors

BEST BUY

BEST FOR SHARING DATA
GARMIN FORERUNNER 310XT £275



Like all these monitors, the Forerunner comes in two parts: a chest strap containing a sensor in contact with the skin, and a wireless wrist unit to process and display the data. The Garmin wrist unit also houses a global positioning satellite (GPS) receiver. The addition of GPS enables the accurate calculation of calories burnt, speed, distance covered and elevation gained as you run. Using the supplied dongle, the data can be transferred wirelessly to a computer then uploaded to Garmin's superb website, which plots your performance on a map and lets you share it with friends. The fully waterproof 310XT also works with cycling and skiing accessories — but when you are swimming it does not record your heart rate and the GPS tracking becomes wildly inaccurate. It won't replace your watch, either, as it's bulky, ugly and needs a recharge every 20 hours.

Verdict: Exercise meets social networking — a great tool for the 21st-century athlete.
★★★★★
www.garmin.co.uk

BEST FOR WALKERS
OREGON SCIENTIFIC SE300 £70

Despite its low price, the SE300 is as tough as the other monitors on test. The readout is clear and the chest strap is as sturdy as that on the Timex, which costs twice as much. It splits heart rates into three zones rather than the usual five (see panel), but it's simple to set up your own zones. The speed and distance functions are estimated from data supplied by an accelerometer in the wrist unit; this proved much less reliable than the Garmin's GPS technology, and it took time to calibrate. There are no accessories available and no way to get the data out of the watch, which is suitable only for walking and running.

Verdict Outstandingly low price, but best suited to slower activities.
★★★★☆
www.oregonscientific.co.uk



BEST FOR REGULAR EXERCISERS
POLAR RS300X £155

If you cycle or run almost every day, the Polar's large, well laid-out display makes it easy to plan and track your workouts, thanks to features such as the ability to calculate a weekly exercise total and call up information from the previous 16 weeks. It's also a good buy for beginners, as it can run a simple fitness test and allows you to set up heart-rate zones with minimum fuss. The chest strap is one of the most comfortable on test, although the sensor needs to be kept quite damp with sweat to detect the heart's bio-electrical beat. Accessories greatly expand its usefulness, but are expensive: a foot pod for tracking your pace is £75.

Verdict Reliable and user-friendly, but pricy.
★★★★☆
www.polarelectro.co.uk



BEST FOR ALL-DAY WEAR
SUUNTO T4C £135

The Suunto is the best built and most attractive wrist monitor on test, being the only one that won't look out of place if worn in the office. The display is well designed, with few of the sometimes distracting icons found on other monitors. As well as the usual heart-rate zones, the Suunto offers "training effect" feedback, which analyses heart-rate data to show how hard you are exercising, and a "coach" mode that provides five-day training suggestions. Matching accessories are expensive — a simple wireless PC dongle is £60.

Verdict Smart, solid and simple to use.
★★★★☆
www.suunto.co.uk



BEST FOR MARATHON RUNNERS
TIMEX IRONMAN RACE TRAINER PACK £140

An Ironman triathlon consists of a 2.4-mile swim, a 112-mile bike ride and a marathon, and it might take all three to explore every feature the Timex and its associated website offer. Choosing, altering and setting heart-rate zones is straightforward, and the display is easy to read, even at night. Workout data are downloaded wirelessly to your computer then fed to an exhaustive (if occasionally confusing) website that offers training plans for serious runners, cyclists and swimmers. The wrist unit's build quality is generally good, but the rigid chest strap is the least comfortable on test.

Verdict Great value, especially when training for long-distance events.
★★★★☆
www.timex.co.uk



HEARTY FACTS

Accessories
Some heart-rate monitors are compatible with additional hardware. The Garmin, Polar and Suunto can link with a small foot pod attached to a running shoe, making them able to measure running speed and pace. Garmin and Suunto also offer a cadence pod, which attaches to a bike frame and measures the pedal rotation rate. The Suunto and Polar have optional GPS receivers and wireless data links.

Chest strap
All monitors come with an elasticated strap that contains sensors to measure your heartbeat and transmit it wirelessly to the wrist unit. The strap usually runs on a small watch battery that will need replacing every year or so.

Heart-rate zones
Exercise is usually divided up into one of five zones, depending on your heart rate. Lower zones (and lower heart rates) are recommended for beginners or when recovering from injury; higher zones burn more fat, and improve your breathing, speed and power. All the monitors here will let you choose a zone, then warn you if your heart rate falls too low or rises too high for it.

GET YOUR

The most useful training aid for anyone serious

FINGER ON THE PULSE

about their exercise is a heart-rate monitor. Mark Harris gets pumping with five of the best

Athletic woman back in **THE GAME** seeks

good **Sport** who looks the **Business**

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THE 10 BEST DISCOUNT WEBSITES

Buying goods and services on the internet is frequently cheaper than on the high street because vendors have lower overheads, with no shops to run. But these 10 sites add another layer of cost-cutting to the experience, as they aim to outdo even the big online retailers. Their pages might sometimes be as visually exciting as a tin of Tesco own-brand beans, but that's all to the good — it means they're paring their costs as much as possible.
Got a subject you'd like to see covered? E-mail us at tupten@sunday-times.co.uk.

1 thehut.co.uk
No, it's nothing to do with pizza. The CDs and DVDs for sale on this site might rarely stray from the bestseller lists, but the prices frequently undercut even the deep discounts offered by the likes of Amazon and Play.com. Delivery is free too.

2 priceline.co.uk
On this travel site's hotel room bidding tool, Name Your Own Price, you bid blind, saying the area in which you'd like to stay and stipulating a star rating, and if your bid wins, you're committed. Martin Lewis, the man behind MoneySavingExpert.com, is a fan, and boasts of once staying in a "super-hot" New York hotel at 75% off.

3 bbclothing.co.uk
Ten years old and set up with the goal of offering men's clothing at better-than-high-street prices, BB typically knocks 10-15% off what you'd expect to pay, and has a no-hassle returns policy.

4 iii.co.uk
With the stock market apparently on the rise, amateur traders can get a piece of the action at a fraction of the usual transaction fees. The site's Portfolio Builder plan charges just £1.50 per trade; the catch is that you have to do it on one of four dates per month.

5 store.steampowered.com
At Steam, PC games get cheaper the longer they've been on the market. They are downloads, so you won't get a disc or a manual, but even the biggest files install over broadband overnight and can be put onto more than one computer.

6 glasses2you.co.uk
Have an eye test on the high street, and get the prescription filled here. Try on frames on an uploaded photograph of yourself.

7 chemistdirect.co.uk
Perfect for penny-pinching hypochondriacs, Chemist Direct promises 20,000 health and

beauty products "at the lowest guaranteed price". That translates as savings of 20-30%.

8 discountbritain.net
Print off a barcode from this site, present it as you pay and watch a fifth of the price slide off the bill at tourist attractions such as the London Dungeon and Sea Life centres.

9 kayak.co.uk
A "screenscraper" is a website that trawls the sites of online retailers to return the most affordable prices. This site is the best for cheap airfares. Type in a destination and date and it will find the best deal currently available from hundreds of airlines.

10 direct-teetimes.co.uk
There isn't a golfer in the country who hasn't left a clubhouse smarting from extortionate green fees. This site allows you to book tee times at hundreds of clubs at a fraction of the normal price.

Mike Peake