All the Pixel Watch 2 really needs is good battery life

While reviewing the Samsung Galaxy Watch 6, I was surprised how much its small gains in battery life impacted my overall attitude toward the watch. It got me wondering whether my opinion about the Google Pixel Watch would change if its paltry battery life was *just* a smidge better. So, the second I wrapped up my Samsung review, I booted up the Pixel Watch.

I had reason to hope because Wear OS watches sometimes have the annoying quirk of getting better *after* the fact. For instance, battery life for the first day or two after setup is often the worst. Sometimes, it's so crappy I wonder if I got a defective unit. But after a few days to about a week, the watch learns your usage patterns, and it gets a little better. Even more annoying is that months later, companies roll out software updates that can take comically bad battery life and make it tolerable. It's not guaranteed on every Android watch, but I've seen it on the Galaxy Watches 4 and 5.

It seems that's what also happened to my Pixel Watch.

For the past 10 days or so, I've gotten 24 to 30 hours on the Pixel Watch with the always-on display (AOD) enabled. This doesn't sound impressive at all when compared to a Garmin watch, but you have to understand how *awful* my Pixel Watch's battery was at launch.

Back in October, I could get away with leaving my charger at home if I babied the battery *and* kept the AOD disabled. Otherwise, with moderate usage and AOD enabled, I got 12 to 15 hours, which meant charging twice a day. That was bad, but worse was watching how fast the battery drained from simple

activities.

For example, while initially reviewing the Pixel Watch, I made a short phone call, played around with settings, and then did a 30-minute test run. In that hour or so, I'd lost 41 percent of battery life. The run itself was responsible for 30 percent. That was the most egregious example, but that kind of drain wasn't a one-time fluke, either.

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But this time around, a 45-minute GPS run on the Pixel Watch with the AOD enabled zapped 30 percent. Still not great, but it took 15 minutes longer to get the same level of battery drain. I regularly went to bed with 35 to 40 percent battery — which is not something I could've said last year. Sleep tracking also used less battery, and unlike in the fall, I never woke up to a dead watch. Although I still had to charge daily, I wasn't worried about leaving my charger at home when I went out.

Right now, that's not enough to dethrone the Galaxy Watch 6 as the best Wear OS watch. However, using Samsung's watches this year felt like watching *The Sixth Sense* a second time. It's easier to appreciate the finer details, but I already know what to expect. That's the burden of being a classic. There are no real surprises.

That's not true of the Pixel Watch. Google is so new to smartwatches that it still has the capacity to surprise, which brings me to the Pixel Watch 2. There's been no shortage of leaks lately — and while you can't trust every leak, an overall picture is starting to form.

Rumor has it the next Pixel Watch ought to have the Qualcomm

Snapdragon W5 chipset and Wear OS 4 — both of which are said to extend battery life. Another leak says there should be a slight bump in battery size as well. Feature-wise, the Pixel Watch 2 will purportedly get the Fitbit Sense 2's continuous electrodermal activity (cEDA) sensor, which measures minuscule amounts of skin sweat to determine stress.

After revisiting the Pixel Watch, I'm convinced all Google really has to do is nail battery life

Altogether, this looks like a significant update on paper. But personally, I can take or leave the health features. After revisiting the Pixel Watch, I'm convinced all Google really has to do is nail battery life. Multiday battery would be ideal, but even getting a reliable 40 hours would be a huge step forward. Customers clearly found the Pixel Watch a compelling debut in *spite* of its first-gen quirks and craptacular battery life. In the first three months of availability, Google shipped an impressive 880,000 units. I can't help but wonder what those numbers would've been if Google *had* managed to deliver better battery life from the get-go.

So far, I'm cautiously optimistic. A new chip, a slightly bigger battery, and Wear OS 4 were enough to make a noticeable improvement on the Galaxy Watch 6 series. Here's hoping it does the same for the Pixel Watch 2.

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