Hands-on with Samsung’s new Galaxy Watch Active

Samsung just spent 90 minutes talking about its new Galaxy S10 phones that are coming out this year, including a folding model, but it also dropped information on a new smartwatch in its line of Galaxy wearables. The Galaxy Watch Active is the latest watch running Samsung’s proprietary Tizen software, and it will be available for $199.99 when it hits shelves on March 8th. We just spent some brief time with the Watch Active, and here’s what you need to know: it’s light. It feels almost unnaturally light.

The biggest change from prior Samsung watches is the lack of a rotating bezel, which is a bit of a bummer. Instead, the Active relies on its touchscreen and two side buttons for navigation. They work fine, but they are a little clumsier than the old rotating bezel. In fact, most of your interactions will consist of swiping left and right.

From the home screen, notifications are on the left, and widgets are on the right. In the app screen, you have to tap one of the tiny app icons once, verify it’s selected by a little dot, then tap again in the center of the screen to open it.

It’s awkward, but at least it’s fast. It feels much more responsive than Wear OS watches, for example, even ones running the newest Qualcomm processor.

Even though it no longer uses the area for hardware

navigation, the Active has a thick bezel surrounding its display, which makes the screen look rather small. But the Active is remarkably light, and it should be rather comfortable to wear for long periods of time.

The Active supports standard Qi wireless charging, which means you can use an S10 to charge it up or just put it on any standard wireless charging pad. Samsung is including a free charging pad with preorders of the Watch Active.

Overall, the device looks nice enough. It comes in at least a couple of different colors. I like that you can easily change watch straps, too. But the bezel around the 1.1-inch screen isn’t exactly small, either. This doesn’t look or feel quite as premium as an Apple Watch, but that might be too much to ask for in an Android-compatible wearable right now. Just hitting the basics in a smartwatch seems to be a struggle, but Samsung seems to have mostly done that here. I just hope it doesn’t require non-Galaxy owners to install four different apps in order to use it.

We’ll be reviewing the Galaxy Watch Active alongside all of Samsung’s new devices in the very near future, so stay tuned for more.

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