Huawei Watch GT review: When hardware and software don’t mesh

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Only a handful of wearable operating systems exists today. Dominating the market are watchOS and Wear OS, unsurprisingly so, as they accompany the two most popular smartphone operating systems. But there are a few challengers out there, like Samsung’s Tizen and Fitbit OS, that give users other options.

Variety is good, so I’m always interested in testing out wearables that don’t run the most popular OSes. Huawei’s latest smartwatch, the Huawei Watch GT, falls into this category, as it runs the company’s LiteOS rather than WearOS. While the Chinese company has primarily focused on its smartphone business this year, going the extra mile to put its own OS on this smartwatch shows that it’s serious about wearables (at least, for the time being).

So what do the Huawei Watch GT and LiteOS have to offer? Essentially, the device is a simplified smartwatch that has all the hardware bells and whistles you’d expect from a a high-end Wear OS device or an Apple Watch—things like an AMOLED display, a continuous heart-rate monitor, an embedded

GPS, and more. But in practice, its feature set and its real-world abilities don’t exactly match its relatively high, $230 price tag.

Design and hardware

It’s possible that Huawei put most of its efforts into LiteOS, because the physical design of the Watch GT isn’t inspired. I almost wrote it off as yet another big-cased, masculine-looking Wear OS device, and it’s essentially that just without Google’s software. The 46mm case features a ceramic bezel and a stainless steel shell, and it was a massive presence on my wrist. Many of my friends gawked at it when I wore it, but my boyfriend wanted to borrow it because he liked its simple design. Its generic qualities are apparently both a blessing and a curse, depending on the eye of the beholder.

The case only has minute numbers etched on the circumference of the display and two physical buttons on its right side; one opens the app drawer, while the other opens the workouts menu. The 1.39-inch AMOLED display is the star of the show: the 454 x 454 pixel, 326ppi panel is bright and sharp, making the bold colors on many of the available watch faces pop. It’s a touchscreen as well, so you can navigate to and from apps by swiping and tapping on its face. Swiping down from the top reveals quick settings like Lock, Do Not Disturb, and Find My Phone, while swiping up from the bottom reveals the notification drawer.

Swiping side to side shows different widgets for activity, heart rate, and the like, while pressing and holding on the watch face lets you change it. But there are only 11 watch faces to choose from, and Huawei doesn’t provide any others. So you’ll have to find at least one within those few options to stick with.

My review unit came with a brown leather band, and combined with the large case, it gave the watch what some would

consider to be a traditionally masculine aesthetic. But the bands have quick-release pins on either side, so you can easily swap them out. Silicone bands are available as well, and I'd go with those since they are better suited for daily workouts. They also suit the device's 5 ATM water resistance that lets you to swim with it. The Watch GT has numerous activity- and sleep-tracking sensors inside, including an accelerometer, gyroscope, barometer, optical heart-rate monitor, and built-in GPS.

What it doesn't have are NFC technology for contactless payments or onboard storage for saving music. Both would have complemented the onboard GPS by allowing users to go for a run without their wallets or phones. The Watch GT also doesn't support Wi-Fi on its own, meaning it won't receive alerts when your smartphone is out of Bluetooth range. This is a feature we take for granted now on high-end smartwatches like Apple Watches and Wear OS devices, making it noticeably and confusingly absent on the Watch GT.

But Huawei equipped the Watch GT with a battery that's designed to last a whopping two weeks on a single charge, with heart-rate monitoring turned on. With GPS turned on as well, you should get up to 22 hours of battery life. Huawei goes so far as to say that you could get 30 days of life when you turn heart-rate monitoring off.

I wouldn't want to turn off heart-rate monitoring because that's one of the main reasons I wear a smartwatch at all. If you wear a device like this to keep track of your health in general, I don't recommend turning this feature off. I didn't and my Watch GT was down to 50 percent after wearing it for six days and nights, recording one-hour long workouts on all but one of those days. That's still a stellar battery life and one that puts those of other smartwatches to shame.

- The Huawei Watch GT.

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- Two side buttons adorn its case for opening the app drawer and the workout menu.
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- Inside are an optical heart-rate monitor, a built-in GPS, barometer, and more.
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- Bands can be replaced and changed using quick-release buttons.
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- The 1.39-inch AMOLED display produces bold graphics.
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