Peloton Tread is the treadmill I want but can’t afford

It didn’t take long for me to understand the draw of Peloton’s indoor cycling bike when I gave it a two-month try last winter. Its allure was less about convenience — any exercise equipment at home is, for most people, more convenient than going to the gym — and more about its magic sauce: live-streamed classes, led by exuberant fitness pros who somehow manage to chatter constantly throughout class.

The Peloton Tread, the $4,000 treadmill unveiled Tuesday, holds the same promise. Running and cross-training classes will stream live from the treadmill’s HD touchscreen; more than 7,000 classes will be available on demand. The question is whether that alone is worth the price.

The Peloton Tread seems designed to completely envelop you in exercise content, because lacking that, it’s just another treadmill

When I first stepped on the new Peloton Tread for a quick demo at CES this week, it was immediately evident that it’s designed in a way to optimize the live-streaming experience. The display is huge — 32 inches — which for me meant I could barely see over the top of it. Beneath the display is a soundbar, for deep, surround sound. There are almost no physical buttons on the entire thing. It’s designed to *envelop* you in exercise content, because without it, it’s just another treadmill.





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Well, any other slat belt treadmill, which tend to be expensive. The Peloton tread has dozens of ball bearings underneath its belt, which a product manager told me was for smoothness. Layered on top are rubberized slats, which give the treadmill belt a nice, springy feel. Is it the most comfortable treadmill in the world? Will it prevent knee injuries? I have no idea, nor would I even try to say after only a quick demo. But it appears to be a well-made treadmill.

I also liked the two giant knobs that live on the insides of the guard rails. These are two of the tactile controls you can use; the one on the left side adjusts incline, and the one on the right, speed. Rather than grip the knobs, you're supposed to slide your palm on top of them while you're running.

The knobs felt a little *too* sensitive during my demo, adjusting the speed beyond what I intended to push it to, but that seems like something that could easily be adjusted. Also:

it was better than pressing a resistive button several times to adjust your speed from 3.5 to 6.7 miles per hour, or whatever your speed might be. Your speed can be adjusted on the touchscreen display as well. And you can pre-set up to three different speeds, and three different inclines, for shortcut access.

The treadmill has storage space underneath it, for the new hand weights that Peloton plans to sell

But most of the screen is occupied by the live classes, lead by fantastically fit instructors who, again, can somehow hold entire conversations with live audiences while they're running. The Peloton leaderboard is also there, on the right-hand side, so you can compare your stats with others as you're running.

Not just running, but also cross-training: Peloton is now selling its own, square-shaped hand weights. The idea is that halfway through the workouts, you're supposed to step *off* the treadmill and get lifting. The treadmill has storage space underneath it, where you can presumably store the weights. This is a nice touch, though some other equipment makers have come up with creative storage options; the latest NordicTrack treadmill, for example, has adjustable dumbbells built into the machine.

I didn't get to experience a cross-training workout on Peloton Tread. But it seems to me like you're going to need a space much bigger than a one-bedroom apartment to accommodate the treadmill and its accessory equipment. Even the company's chief executive officer, John Foley, noted during the demo that the Peloton Tread won't fit in his own home in New York City (although he then said it would go in his summer home.)



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Now that I've asked you to join me in treadmill fantasy land for a solid 500 words, let's come crashing back to reality: this treadmill costs $4,000. That is a lot of money for any piece of equipment, whether a computer, a bike, or yes, a treadmill. Foley said that the company is selling the treadmill at cost, something that sources have told me is the case with the Peloton bike as well. The company makes money off its $39-per-month subscription service, then, and not the equipment, but I'm not sure knowing that makes it any easier to swallow the price.

Foley also pointed out ways in which the cost structure could, in theory, seem more palatable. For one, existing Peloton bike owners are getting a deal on the treadmill. Two, the treadmill can be paid for in monthly installments of $149, with zero interest, over 39 months. Three – and this is the same for the bike – the treadmill supports multiple users under the same subscription. So if you're a family paying for multiple monthly gym memberships or classes, you might be able to justify the cost of Peloton.

He also noted that Peloton has a ridiculously high retention rate of users once they start using the Peloton bike – which gym chains and some other makers of gym equipment can't always claim. Having used the Peloton bike before, I can believe this. It's addictive.

Still, selling a prohibitively expensive treadmill is a curious strategy for a company with the ultimate goal of selling more software services. Hardcore Peloton fans and people with a lot of disposable income will be tempted. People who are intrigued by the Peloton community will be tempted. Anything that offers a reprieve from mind-numbingly boring workouts in dank basements is tempting, especially in the new year. Me? I'll just think longingly about it when I'm on an aging treadmill.

This post was originally published on January 12th and has been updated to include video.

https://www.theverge.com/2018/1/11/16874494/peloton-tread-treadmill-first-impressions-look-live-streaming-exercise-ces-2018