What can Google do to compete with the Apple Watch? Not much

Here's my review of the Apple Watch Series 5. It is, of course, the best smartwatch for iPhone users. If you don't want to spend $400, you can go get a Fitbit Versa or a hybrid smartwatch or – and this is probably the better choice – get an Apple Watch Series 3 for just $200.

I have said pretty much all I have to say about the Apple Watch in the review above, but luckily for me a coincidental leak of a Fossil smartwatch showed up, as if it was begging to be compared to the Apple Watch. Okay, let's do that.

Before we get started, though, I should say that sometimes when a leak comes out at just the *perfect* time you wonder if it was planted, or if you trust the outlet to not take plants, if it was somehow *intentionally* leaked. I usually don't put stock into such claims – Hanlon's razor states "Never attribute to malice that which is adequately explained by stupidity."

In other words: it's fun to imagine giant corporations are playing 4D chess and strategically ensuring they're inserted into the conversation at opportune times, but it's much more likely that stuff just leaks.

That's doubly true with this Fossil, because it doesn't look super hot next to the Apple Watch. It's an object lesson in how leaks sort of happen. The chain of where it came from and what might be involved is a little tough to follow, so here's a quick (pardon the pun) tick-tock:

1. Google beats everybody to the punch by announcing Android Wear watches in May 2014 (just months ahead of

the Apple Watch).
2. Android Wear flounders, due to several reasons – not all of which you can pin solely on Google.
3. Meanwhile, the Apple Watch overcomes a lackluster first-generation product to become a great product and a massive business for Apple, eating everybody else's lunch.
4. Google realizes how far behind it is and tries to get all asymmetrical with its competitive strategy by partnering with watch companies like Fossil and Tag Heuer.
5. …
6. Only Apple profits.

That's where we stand now, when we see a few images and descriptions of watches that look like they're running Wear OS on an E Ink screen underneath actual, physical watch hands. It's reportedly built off of the technology Google acquired from its bestie Fossil for $40 million called "Diana."

The rumored Fossils look like interim solutions
It may or may not actually be Wear OS (my guess is that it is). It may or may not actually use E Ink. Even if both of those things turn out to be true, nailing the execution of an E Ink watch that needs to show information underneath physical watch hands is going to be devilishly tricky.

Whatever it is, it is not a heads-up competitor to the Apple Watch.

I, along with pretty much every other reporter who watches Android closely, have been bemoaning the sorry state of smartwatch options for Android users for quite some time. A bunch of options are fine, but none are great. It's gotten to the point where my readers are probably as tired of hearing it from me as I am of saying it (so this might be the last time for a while).

The rumored Fossil smartwatch that may run Wear OS and may have an E-Ink screen.
But I bring it up *again* here just to make sure that expectations are properly set: whatever Fossil is working on here, it's another version of step three above — it will be in a subtly different category. I suspect it will be a watch for people who want physical hands and who won't want to have to charge it as often.

That's theoretically a smart move from both Google and Fossil, but it's also a sign that Google is nowhere near being able to take on the Apple Watch directly. Wear OS is getting more mature as a software platform — it has most of the features you'd want, albeit in basic form. But the hardware it runs on is not very good.

Don't hold your breath for Google to figure it out this year, though. Because while that Fossil leak wasn't really timed for the Apple Watch, Nick Bastone's excellent investigation at *Business Insider* surely was. Bastone tells the story from inside Google, confirming that hardware chief Rick Osterloh nixed a planned Pixel Watch a few years ago.

Google unquestionably made the right call by nixing the Pixel Watch in 2016
It was unquestionably the right call. I can say that because I used those smartwatches — they were eventually released under LG branding in 2017 and they were an embarrassment. Dan Seifert's review got it exactly right, but let me underline that a watch that you can't trust to last more than 12 or so hours would have been awful for Google's brand.

What does Osterloh — and Google — do now? Hopefully find a way to get a better processor that runs better on watches than the dreck Qualcomm reheated in 2018. Then Google has to revisit the decision to let partners take the lead on hardware.

You can probably guess what I think Google should do: try again to make something itself. No other company is going to do much more than experiment with Wear OS, there's no existential incentive to do so. Even Qualcomm doesn't seem interested.

All of which means Android users need to temper their expectations, because figuring out how to get the right processor to make a good watch is not a thing that any company can do in just a year or even two. Maybe Google's already been working on it, maybe not.

Until then, have you seen Samsung's Tizen-based watches? They're fine, and a new one that was announced not too long ago seems pretty okay. Yep. Okay, fine.

More from *The Verge*

+ The 10 Apple Arcade launch games you have to play

This is an essential list and I agree with everything Andrew Webster picked here (though I haven't played all of these yet, trust me, you can trust him). Weird problem, though: too many games!

+ The first iPhone 11 Pro Max teardown confirms a 25 percent bigger battery

Turns out when you add a bigger battery, you get better battery life! "The 11 Pro Max has a 15.04 watt-hour battery, nearly 25 percent larger than the iPhone XS Max's 12.06 watt-hour cells."

+ Truly, Apple, you can have this one. All yours: Apple is trying to trademark 'Slofie'

+ NBCUniversal’s new streaming service could spell trouble for Hulu

Julia Alexander is not afraid of using an uncomfortable metaphor. It’s never the kid’s fault except in media, where it’s the kid’s fault because the kid hurt the parents’ ability to make more money.

> *Think of Hulu as a child of divorce. It was once owned by a number of companies who saw Hulu as their entry point into online streaming, including AT&T’s WarnerMedia, 21st Century Fox, and Comcast’s NBCUniversal.*

+ Facebook introduces Portal TV, a video chat camera accessory for your television and second-generation Portal devices that are cheaper, smaller, and support WhatsApp

The reaction to the first Portal was universally “do you really trust Facebook to put a camera in your home?” These new Portals look like genuinely good hardware, but I don’t know yet if they’ll change that reaction. My favorite part: the switch for turning off the microphone and camera is physical and three-stage, with clear colors that tell you exactly what’s on and what’s off. Smart. (Also, disclosure: my wife works for Oculus which is a division of Facebook.)

+ Sonos Move review: house shaker, not road warrior

But here’s a smart home device that many more people will have some affinity for (though it, too, could record you!). Dan Seifert has our review, and this is going to be worth $400 to a lot of Sonos people and… nobody else?

> *If you’re looking for a truly portable Bluetooth speaker to take to the park or the beach, the Move is not the right solution. But if you’ve been wanting the ability to take your Sonos speaker out to the patio, down to the basement, in the garage, or anywhere else where you don’t need a full-time*

> *dedicated speaker but where you want to occasionally listen to music, then the Move is exactly the thing you've been looking for.*

Today in Pixel (and Huawei) leaks

+ Huawei's Thursday event lineup apparently leaks in full

Stay tuned for a bunch of stuff from Huawei on Thursday, but unless I'm wildly out of touch with Huawei (which is possible, as it can't sell stuff where I live anymore), the main event here is unquestionably the Mate 30 lineup. How will Huawei address the Google software ban? This is our first chance to really see.

+ Everything we know about the Pixel 4, the most-leaked phone ever

Jay Peters and Sean Hollister put together this comprehensive guide that details every Pixel 4 leak, rumor, and Google's own teases — all in a format that's actually easy to follow. Even if you think you have been keeping up with Pixel 4 rumors, it's worth a look. I definitely learned a couple things that I had missed (or forgotten about)!

https://www.theverge.com/2019/9/19/20872874/google-apple-watch-wear-os-competition-fossil-smartwatch