

Pixel Watch 2 review: Google smartwatch gets speed and battery boost

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Google's second-generation Pixel smartwatch fixes many of its predecessor's problems, with a much faster chip, longer battery life and better health features – but it still isn't repairable, which is a huge shame. The Pixel Watch 2 costs £349 (€399/\$349.99/A\$549) and aims to be the Apple Watch for Android, but faces stiff competition from Samsung's longstanding Galaxy Watch line. The new model looks the same on the outside as Google's first attempt, except that the body of the watch is made of aluminium and 5g lighter than the stainless steel previously used. Its smooth domed shape is comfortable to wear, with a crown and button on one side and a speaker on the other. It comes with a silicone band – various different styles are available from Google or third parties – and will fit with any band made for previous models, using the same button-release system to make them easy to swap out. Faster and lasts longer The Watch 2 has a more modern Qualcomm chip at its heart, which makes it more responsive to your swipes, taps, scrolls and Assistant requests than its predecessor. But the bigger boost is in battery life, which is now comfortably 36-38 hours, including sleep tracking. A 30-minute run consumes about 8% of the battery. The Watch 2 still falls slightly short of the best in the market but lasts long enough for a smartwatch you are going to mostly charge daily. Specifications Screen: 3cm AMOLED (320ppi) Case size: 41mm Case thickness: 12.3mm Band size: 20mm proprietary Weight: 31g Processor: Qualcomm Snapdragon SW5100 RAM: 2GB Storage: 32GB Operating system: Wear OS 4 (Android 13) Water resistance: 50 metres (5ATM)/IP68 Sensors: barometer, altimeter, gyro, HR, ECG, SpO2, cEDA, temperature, NFC, GNSS, compass Connectivity: Bluetooth 5, wifi 4 (n), NFC, optional 4G/eSim Sustainability Google does not provide an expected lifespan for the battery but it should last in excess of 500 full charge cycles with at least 80% of its original capacity. It cannot be replaced, and the watch is currently unrepairable. The Pixel Watch 2 is made with recycled aluminium and rare earth elements. The company breaks down the watch's environmental impact in its report. Google will recycle old devices free of charge. Wear OS 4 The watch ships with the latest Wear OS software and will be supported for at least three years. Wear OS 4 has the new Gmail and Calendar apps, which are essentially scaled-down versions of the phone apps. If you want to triage your email on your watch, this is for you. It also has enhanced notifications, faster and more reliable dictation, and a safety check feature that lets a contact know if you got home safe. More third-party apps are starting to arrive for Google's reinvigorated watch platform. A key recent addition is a full WhatsApp app, which makes it easy to start or reply to conversations on your wrist – something not even Apple's Watch has yet. Fitbit for health tracking The Watch 2 uses Google's Fitbit service and apps to take care of health and activity tracking. For general health monitoring, it has all the features you are likely to want, including the usual heart rate

monitoring, ECGs, steps, good sleep tracking and many other metrics. New for the Watch 2 is a skin sensor for tracking stress, which is combined with various other data to record events and suggest calming activities, such as controlled breathing when you are stressed. Sport tracking has always been Fitbit's weakness. Google has improved things, with automatic detection for seven workouts including walking, running and cycling, plus the addition of customised heart rate zones and pace targets. The new multipath heart rate sensor has improved accuracy during vigorous activity, too. But Fitbit still falls short of rivals for more advanced features, such as running dynamics, cadence, route guidance and other bits that are available on Samsung and Apple's watches. I also found the Watch 2 could sometimes just completely miss part of a run, recording only the route out or back, not the loop I was actually running. Much of Google's more advanced health-monitoring features are locked behind a Fitbit Premium subscription, generally offering deeper analysis of your metrics and various coaching programmes such as strength, cardio and yoga. The watch comes with a six-month trial of Fitbit Premium, which then costs £7.99 a month unless you cancel. Price The Google Pixel Watch 2 costs from £349 (€399/\$349.99/A\$549). For comparison, the Samsung Galaxy Watch 6 costs from £289, the Apple Watch Series 9 costs from £399 and the Garmin Venu 3 costs from £449.99. Verdict Google has fixed two big things for version two of its smartwatch: a faster chip and longer battery life. It is small, light, comfortable to wear, looks good and is slick in operation. But those seeking a bigger screen will have to look elsewhere, as the Pixel Watch 2 is on the small side, suiting slender wrists, without an option for a larger size. The Pixel Watch 2 is a good general smartwatch for Android, and it will certainly appeal to those with Pixel phones. The trouble is, Samsung's Galaxy Watches do just as much and have better advanced sport tracking, while costing less and offering more than one size and style. The biggest problem with the Pixel Watch 2, however, is that Google still doesn't offer repair options for its smartwatches. If you break the screen, your only option is to replace the whole watch, which is poor and loses a star. Google can and should be doing better. Pros: snappy, smooth design, 50-metre water resistance, Fitbit, Play Store with growing selection of apps, all Google apps, good integration with Google ecosystem, good watch faces, works with most Android phones. Cons: not repairable, expensive, small size only with small screen, Fitbit still limited for workout tracking.