

# Forerunner 165 review: Garmin's budget OLED running watch

Publication Date: 2024-03-04

Author: Samuel Gibbs

Section: Technology

Tags: Garmin, Smartwatches, Wearable technology, Gadgets, GPS, reviews

Article URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2024/mar/04/forerunner-165-review-garmin-oled-running-watch>



Garmin's latest smart sports watch condenses all the great features from its higher-end Forerunner models into a cheaper, simpler running tracker with a bright OLED screen and long battery life. The Forerunner 165 is the new base model in Garmin's new lineup, priced from £250 (€280/\$250/A\$429) compared with the £430 Forerunner 265. The watch comes in a choice of colours but only one size, with a 1.2in screen and 43mm case – bang in the middle of the small and large sizes of the more expensive 265. It is a good size, with a crisp OLED display that's large enough to make it easily readable at a glance, while feeling slim, light and compact on the wrist. It has the same great combination of touchscreen and five buttons as recent Garmin watches. It syncs data to an Android or iPhone through the Connect app, via USB cable to your computer or direct to the internet through wifi if you buy the more expensive version with offline music playback. The battery lasts about five days between charges with the screen on all the time, tracking sleep overnight and a single 40-minute run. That is shorter than the 265 by a few days but more than double mainstream smartwatch rivals. Setting the screen to turn on only when you rotate your wrist extends the battery life to more than 11 days. Runs consume about 6% battery for each hour or 14% with offline music from Spotify, which makes it last more than long enough for most people. A full charge via the USB-C cable takes about an hour. Specifications Screen: 1.2in AMOLED Case size: 43mm Case thickness: 11.6mm Band size: standard 20mm Weight: 39g Storage: 4GB Water resistance: 50 metres (5ATM) Sensors: GNSS (GPS, Glonass, Galileo), compass, thermometer, heart rate, pulse Ox Connectivity: Bluetooth, ANT+ (wifi with music) Sport tracking prowess The big difference between the 165 and higher-end Garmin models is the lack of multisport tracking, such as automatic transitions between runs, cycles and swimming for a triathlon. Otherwise it tracks a total of 24 individual sports including various forms of cycling, running and swimming, walking and hiking, gym activities and racket sports. The notable absences are skiing and snowboarding. For running it tracks all the usual metrics such as time, distance, pace, cadence, laps, but also running dynamics and power, which are both rarer but welcome features for more enthusiastic runner. During a workout you can have up to four metrics on screen at any one, with a clear and easy to read at a glance display. For most uses on a run the 165 behaves almost exactly the same as a 265 or the top-of-the-line Forerunner 965, which is excellent. It lacks dual-band or "multiband" GPS, which means on paper its location tracking is not as accurate as higher-end Garmin models when running in trickier environments such as cities with lots of tall buildings or dense forests. But in a test side-by-side with a 965 with the feature, the two watches got a GPS lock very quickly and barely deviated from the correct track and pace, which was very impressive. The watch can tell you when you veer off a planned route but lacks full offline maps to see where you are, which is a feature still reserved for Garmin's top watches. The final thing missing from Garmin's best-in-class sport

tracking on the 165 is training readiness, status and load, which are three measures on the firm's high-end watches useful for measuring the effectiveness of training for goals, such as increased fitness or marathon prep. Garmin's full suite of general health tracking measures are on the 165, including sleep and nap detection, daily calories, steps, stress and all the other things you should expect from a smartwatch, including notifications from your phone and contactless payments. The only thing missing is the ability to take an ECG of your heart, which probably doesn't matter for a sports watch. Sustainability The Forerunner 165 is generally repairable, and out-of-warranty exchange and refurbishment are available. The battery is rated to last at least a few years of frequent charge cycles while maintaining at least 80% capacity. The watch does not contain any recycled materials. Garmin guarantees at least two years of security updates from release but typically supports its devices far longer. It offers trade-in schemes for some lines and complies with WEEE and other local electronics recycling laws. Price The Garmin Forerunner 165 is priced at £249.99 (€279.99/\$249.99/A\$429) or £289.99 (€329.99/\$299.99/A\$499) with offline music support. For comparison, the Forerunner 265 is £429.99, the Apple Watch Series 9 is £399, the Google Pixel Watch 2 is £349, the Coros Pace 3 is £219 and the Polar Pacer Pro is £289. Verdict The Forerunner 165 is an excellent running watch that condenses the best bits from its top-class siblings into a simpler, cheaper model. It has a great, clear and bright OLED screen that's easy to read mid-run. It has all the metrics to keep track of your pace and performance and has a long enough battery to go the distance for most users. Its compact and light body keeps it comfortable even for long training sessions and the combo of touch and buttons is best in class. The only things really missing are offline maps and more advanced training metrics. The lack of the more advanced, multiband GPS tracking doesn't appear to significantly impact tracking accuracy, for which Garmin is still the leader. The biggest problem is the price. At £250 or £290 with offline music, it is more expensive than most beginners' running watches, though in line with OLED-equipped smartwatches from tech rivals and a £180 saving over the Forerunner 265. Unless you want to track triathlons or need offline maps, the Forerunner 165 is the new Garmin running watch to go for. Pros: slim, light, real buttons, and crisp OLED touchscreen, accurate GPS and heart rate, extensive stats, good health tracking, five-day battery life, offline music option, basic smartwatch features. Cons: a little expensive, no offline maps, no voice assistant, no multiband GPS, no multisport transitions, limited Garmin Pay compatibility with UK banks.