

Apple Watch Series 9 and Ultra 2 review: faster chips and brighter screens

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Author: Samuel Gibbs

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Apple's smartwatches get their first speed increase in years along with brighter screens and new hands-free gestures – keeping the market leader still miles ahead of the pack. The Apple Watch Series 9 comes in various sizes and materials and starts at £399 (€449/\$399/A\$649) – a £20 price cut in the UK. It launches alongside the Ultra 2 costing £799 (€899/\$799/A\$1,399), which is £50 cheaper than last year's model. Both watches look the same as their predecessors on the outside. The Series 9 has a more svelte pillow-shaped profile available in 41mm or 45mm size options, while the 49mm Ultra 2 embraces the chunky look with a solid titanium shell and oversized buttons. New for this year are significantly brighter screens. The Series 9 is now twice as bright as last year's Series 8, peaking at 2,000 nits, which matches rival Samsung's Galaxy Watch 6, and is the same maximum brightness as the iPhone 15 Pro Max. The brighter the screen, the easier it is to read in direct sunlight, which is particularly important for a watch. The Ultra 2 goes even further, with a screen capable of hitting an incredible 3,000 nits at its peak – 50% brighter than last year's model. The super-bright screen is almost overkill unless you happen to be hiking through a desert, but its full brightness can be deployed for its built-in torch mode, which helps to better light the way. New, faster chip The new S9 chip in both watches is the first since 2020's S6 to get a significant speed increase. The 30% performance gain isn't radical in day-to-day activities, except for Siri interactions, many of which are now processed on the watch. Setting timers, making calls and other simple interactions are rapid and now work without an iPhone or data connection. Dictation for messages and notes is also up to 25% more accurate as well, making it faster to fire off replies without a phone. The battery life on both models remains about 36 hours for the Series 9 and closer to 70 hours for the Ultra 2, which is enough for a day and night, or almost three days respectively between charges. Double-tap coming soon Apple is also adding a new gesture for hands-free usage of the watch called double-tap, which recognises when you double-pinch your finger and thumb together. It is a simplified version of one of Apple's existing AssistiveTouch accessibility features for the watch, but faster and made a standard part of the interface for all. You can double-pinch to silence an alarm, timer, take or end a call and other primary actions. It only works when the screen is active, so the watch has been turned towards you, which stops accidental triggering. The feature requires the watchOS 10.1 update, which is now in testing in public beta and worked very well, and is expected to roll out fully before the end of October. Sustainability Apple 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, and can be replaced for £95. Repairs cost between £309 and £509 depending on the model. It contains recycled aluminium or titanium, cobalt, copper, gold, plastic, rare earth elements, tin and tungsten. Apple offers trade-in

and free recycling for devices, and breaks down each watch's environmental impact in its reports. Price The Series 9 comes in two sizes (41 and 45mm), a choice of materials and the option of 4G that requires an e-sim and compatible phone plan add-on. It starts at £399 (\$399/A\$649). 4G models cost an extra £100 (\$100/A\$160). The Ultra 2 costs £799 (\$799/A\$1,399). For comparison, the Apple Watch SE costs £259, the Samsung Galaxy Watch 6 costs £289, the Google Pixel Watch 2 costs £349, the Garmin Venu 3 costs £449 and the Garmin Epix Pro costs £829. Verdict It didn't require much to keep Apple's smartwatches at the top of the pack, but both the Series 9 and Ultra 2 have small but meaningful updates that will take some beating, even if they don't look any different on the outside. Significantly brighter screens make a world of difference when trying to read the time, alerts and exercise metrics at a glance outdoors. The faster chip will make sure the watch remains rapid over the next few years, and makes interacting with Siri super-quick even when not near your phone. The upcoming double-tap gesture is a nice add-on, too, and makes moments such as checking train times while rushing with bags in hand a little easier. If you want the best smartwatch for an iPhone, there's still no beating the Apple Watch in either flavour. [Apple Watch Series 8 review: better women's health tracking in same capable package](#) [Apple Watch Ultra review: the super-charged smartwatch](#)