

MIO Alpha BLE Review

●●●●○ 4.0 EXCELLENT

By [Jill Duffy](#) January 28, 2013 [f](#) [t](#) ...



THE BOTTOM LINE

For running, cycling, and plenty of other endurance sports, the MIO Alpha BLE represents a major upgrade in comfort and ease-of-use in heart rate monitors, but it's also quite expensive in comparison.

MSRP \$199.99

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PROS

CONS

- ✓ Reads heart rate without the need for a chest strap.
 - ✓ Accurate.
 - ✓ Comfortable.
 - ✓ Rechargeable battery.
 - ✓ Waterproof.
- Somewhat expensive.
 - Chunky.
 - Heart rate is the only personal data measured.

Heart rate, as athletes know, indicates fitness and exercise intensity better than most other metrics. Until very recently, the only reliable way to measure heart rate was to wear a chest strap, as I did while testing the [Digifit iCardio Multi-Sport Heart Rate Monitor](#). I can say from personal experience that they're not only uncomfortable, but also require another device to read their output, and try doing that while maintaining speed and watching where you're going. A new wristwatch, the MIO Alpha BLE (\$199 direct) ([at Amazon](#)) reads heart rate through an optical sensor on its back and displays it in real time. Simple as that.

For running, cycling, and plenty of other endurance sports, the Alpha represents a huge upgrade in comfort and ease-of-use in heart rate monitors. It includes a number of useful features and settings, too, such as stopwatch functionality during which you can record your heart rate and keep track of your time spent in the zone (between the low and "up" heart rate you set for yourself). Considering the \$200 price, though, the MIO Alpha BLE is somewhat expensive. Because I follow the rapidly growing field of [activity trackers and other personal fitness gadgets](#), I wanted the Alpha to do a little more, such as measure distance traveled or steps taken, which it does not. You can get some of these stats by pairing the MIO with a compatible app, such as MapMyRun or RunKeeper, but I'd ideally like to see a pedometer-like reading right on the device itself.

Design

Much more comfortable than a chest strap, the MIO Alpha looks like a chunky sports watch, with a pliant, durable silicone band. The watch face, available in two accent colors, "shadow" (black) and "arctic" (white), displays data in large format using a negative dot matrix LCD, which makes it easy to read even in strong sunlight. On both the left and right of the watch is a single button that's flush against the watch face, for navigating the features and changing the settings.





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More Details

It also comes with a USB charging station for the rechargeable lithium polymer battery, which attaches magnetically to the back of the watch.

I find the device rather attractive, and especially like the row of three holes in the band, for securing with a three-pronged clasp, that travel its entire length. The MIO Alpha should be worn a little higher on the arm and more snugly than a typical watch, as it needs to be in close contact with your skin to accurately read your heart rate. Of course, when you're not taking your heart rate, you can readjust it to wherever it's most comfortable.

How it Works

The MIO Alpha BLE works by using an optical sensor, located on the back of the watch, to read the volume of blood under your skin, and therefore take your pulse. The heart rate function does not run constantly. You have to turn it on and off. Press and hold the right side button, and it will read your current heart rate,

displaying it on the watch face in real time. When you're not taking your heart rate, the MIO Alpha displays only the time.

Accuracy

In testing the MIO Alpha BLE, I took several readings of my resting heart rate just to get a sense of how the device worked and found it to always be within two beats per minute of my own reading (using the rudimentary two-fingers-to-the-neck method).

Then, I wore the watch to the gym and took a few more readings that I compared with the readings from the hand-grip sensors on some cardio equipment, which are sometimes accurate and sometimes ghastly off. I jumped on an elliptical trainer, took a few readings using the hand sensors to make sure they were at least within the range of my expectations (they were), and worked up a sweat. I turned on the Alpha MIO and started comparing. Every reading was once again within two beats per minute. Impressive.

Additional Features

The button to the left of the watch face activates additional features that make the MIO Alpha BLE a true athletic gadget. You can adjust your minimum and maximum desired heart rate (it defaults to 110 to 130 beats per minute), and while you're working out, the Alpha will beep if you're not in the desired zone. It also flashes a colored light to indicate whether you're over (red), under (blue), or within (green) the zone you set.

You can also turn on a stopwatch feature that lets you time an activity while reading your heart rate in the background, which is where the colored lights and audio cues really help, as you can hear them and see them from the corner of your eye without slowing down to focus on the precise reading.

To integrate your heart rate stats into other data from health and fitness apps, you'll need a mobile device with Bluetooth 4.0, and one of the following compatible apps: Adidas MiCoach, Endomo, [MapMyRide](#), MapMyRun, RunKeeper, Strava, or Wahoo Fitness.

While the watch is waterproof and you can even swim while wearing it, the instructions warn against pressing the watch's buttons while underwater. You'll need to turn on the heart rate function and set up the timer before hopping into the pool.

Pricey, but Among the Best

I highly recommend the MIO Alpha BLE over a chest strap for any athlete or fitness buff looking to add heart rate to their personal data measurements. For the price, however, I do wish it had at least one or two more features for tracking activity directly, although for the time being, at least you can pair it with an app.

If in its second or third iteration the MIO Alpha can add a few key personal fitness tracking features, such as steps taken and total distance traveled, it might be a five-star product. The question is whether it will get there first, as the competition is fierce—which is a good thing for consumers.

MIO Alpha BLE

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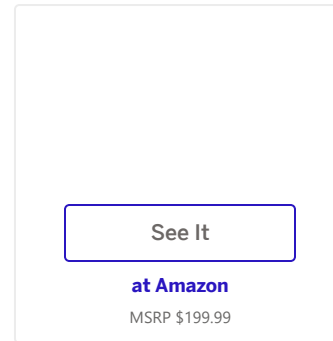
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About Jill Duffy



Jill Duffy is a contributing editor covering productivity apps and software, as well as technologies for health and fitness. She writes the Get Organized column, with tips on how to lead a better digital life. Follow her on Twitter (below) or get in touch on the [Jill Duffy contact page](#).

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