

How to Select the Best Running Treadmill for your Body and Budget



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About the Author

Fred Waters has worked in the fitness equipment industry for over 16 years. He was previously V.P. of Marketing for Smooth Fitness. He has been reviewing fitness equipment for over 8 years. His treadmill review web site (<http://www.Treadmill-Ratings-Reviews.com>) is one of the few review sites that is actually written by an industry insider. You will find much of the information is based on visiting the company headquarters and talking to the individuals involved in the construction and design of the treadmills. Over the years he has assisted literally thousands of individuals in finding the right treadmill for their body and budget!



As a runner I can understand the obsessive desire to run on a regular bases, and that is why many runners purchase a treadmill as an alternative to running outside. As someone who has worked in the treadmill industry for a number of years, I also understand how complicated it can be to select the right treadmill for your body and your budget.

Bargain basement treadmills can start at a couple of hundred dollars, while commercial grade treadmills for the home can cost thousands of dollars. The quality of the components and the array of features can vary dramatically.

Runners, in particular, require a treadmill that can withstand the abuse that comes with running. And running on a treadmill can be very abusive. Unfortunately, many runners buy treadmills that do not match their physical needs. In this e-book I want to educate my fellow runners in how to select a treadmill that will not only withstand a runner's abuse, but will also provide a rewarding running experience. First, let's discuss the various benefits of owning a treadmill.

BENEFITS OF RUNNING ON A TREADMILL

YOU CAN RUN IN ANY TYPE OF WEATHER



When I was younger and lived in Chicago I was a running fanatic, and the weather was not going to stop. I also had an Australian Sheppard that was bred for running and needed to burn off that Aussie energy. I use to run in most god awful weather. That included running in summer jungle heat and winter deep freezes. In the summer there were times when every part of my running

clothes was drenched in sweat. In the dead of winter I had to avoid frostbite.

As someone who evaluates fitness equipment for a living, I have to admit that my preference is to run outdoors. I love the fresh air and the pleasure it gives my dog. But both of the dog and I are getting older, and I personally would rather run indoors when the weather hits extremes.

DAYLIGHT IS NOT AN ISSUE

Another benefit of running on a treadmill is that you do not need to schedule your running around the daylight hours. Back in the days when I commuted to a job in downtown Chicago, I had to start running at 5:15 am. It was dark, and running in the dark sucks. If you run in the streets you have to worry about getting run over by a car. Forget about running on trails, because you can't see a thing. In the dead of winter in Chicago it didn't get light until about 7:30 am and during the winter solstice the sun set as early as 4:20 pm. If you are a working stiff there is no way you can run in the daylight before or after work during the winter.

A FORGIVING SURFACE



According to a clinical study of 4,000 runners by the Southern California Podiatrist John Pagliano, one of the five leading causes of injury is an improper running surface. Another study showed that runners can impact the surface at almost two and half times their body weight. That not only causes major stress to your joints, but also your lower back. This impact is particularly a concern if you are running on concrete or asphalt.

Treadmills are specifically designed to absorb the shock of your impact. Treadmills can reduce the impact by as much as 40%. In fact, many are designed to absorb the shock of your impact at the front of the deck, while providing a solid push-off towards the rear. For individuals that are suffering from stress related injuries, a treadmill can provide a therapeutic alternative to your running routine. It can also contribute to a longer and healthier running career.

Furthermore, a treadmill provides a smooth and level running surface, consequently there is considerably less chance of twisting your ankle or knee on an uneven outdoor surface. I have always found tree roots hidden under leaves to be particularly treacherous.

MONITORING YOUR PROGRESS



When running on a treadmill you can precisely monitor your speed, distance and heart rate. You can also track calories burned. If you are striving towards particular fitness goals, a treadmill provides you with the necessary feedback to track your progress. In fact, there are a number of treadmill models that allow you to download your stats onto your own personal web page and provide a log, allowing you to track your progress. Most do this through the use of a USB device, but one brand actually allows your treadmill to communicate directly to the Internet, and automatically downloads your stats.

The alternative to owning a treadmill is using one at your local health club. However, I always found that getting motivated to drive to the club, change and then find an available treadmill, often discouraged me from working out.

Plus, I usually hated what they had on the televisions. With your own treadmill you can exercise at your convenience and in the comfort of your home and watch whatever you want on TV. And you will probably workout more often.

Running Treadmill Features

A SUFFICIENTLY POWERFUL MOTOR



Treadmill motors are rated by their continuous duty horsepower, not peak horsepower. The continuous duty rating is the horsepower the treadmill motor can run at without much effort. For runners you want a treadmill that is at least 3.0 continuous duty HP. That will provide you with a motor that will run effortlessly at higher speeds. It should also be relatively quiet. The exception would be for individuals over 300 lbs., who may need a higher horsepower. Practically all treadmill motors at this level come with a lifetime motor warranty.

THE PROPER TREADBELT LENGTH

Most treadmills that I qualify as running treadmills will probably have treadbelts in excess of 58". For taller individuals, or runners who have a particularly long stride, you may want to consider a treadmill with 60" treadbelt, which has become somewhat of a standard at this level of usage. Be aware that treadmill manufacturers have two ways of defining the length. Some define the length by the actual length of the belt. In this case a portion of the belt can be covered with the plastic shroud, as much as 3". Others define the length by the actual running surface.

PROPER SHOCK ABSORPTION



As mentioned above , the ability to absorb some of the shock from the impact of running is one of the main benefits of a treadmill. However, you will find the shock absorption will vary with different manufacturers. As a runner, you want shock absorption that adequately reduces the impact without providing too much bounce, which can result in a reverse shock to your body.

Typically treadmill decks sit on a series of rubber grommets that look like black marshmallows. Cheaper treadmills may have a couple on each side, while higher priced machine may have a series of 4 or 5 on each side, providing an equal distribution of shock resistance. Brands like Sole tend to have a stiffer deck, which they claim is preferable for runners. Other brands like NordicTrack will have a deck that tends to give more, and of course they claim this is superior because it returns some of the energy from the impact. So which is better? It really is an individual preference. For those use to running on asphalt, they may find the stiffer deck on the Sole to be preferable. For those use to running on trails, you may find the NordicTrack to your liking.

The high-end Precor treadmills utilize a different shock absorption concept. The design offers similar shock absorption for individuals of different weight. Precor utilizes a triangular-shaped shock absorbers at the front of the deck that bows based on your weight. According to the company, "This unique feature progressively absorbs impact based on your height and weight." It also adjusts the impact based on whether you are training for a marathon or are using the treadmill for walking.

LARGER ROLLERS

Although there are some exceptions to this rule, in general, the larger the rollers the better. At least 2.5" is recommended. A larger roller requires less rotations from the motor. It also provides a larger surface for the treadbelt to grip. Consequently, you have less slippage and stress on the belt. Larger rollers will extend the life of the belt, motor and bearings. And it can reduce the overall noise level.

FOLDING VS. NON-FOLDING



Years ago there could be considerable difference in the stability of a folding and non-folding treadmill.

Improvements have reduced that difference, and these days non-folding treadmills can be very stable. However, there is still a couple of benefits of a non-folding treadmill to runners.

First, they will have a slight edge in stability because they are built on a stationary frame. They also require fewer components, so a non-folding treadmill could be a few dollars less. For example, the Sole F85 folding treadmill typically sells for \$1,999. The Sole S77, which is the same treadmill without the folding mechanism, sells for \$1,899.

PROGRAMMING

Until the last couple of years the programming on treadmills was fairly standard. You would get a series of programs that would vary the speed and incline. They often focused on goals like calorie burning, cardio workout, interval training, etc. A treadmill could have anywhere from 4-40 different installed programs. Some treadmills would also allow you to create

your own personalized workout, based on your speed and incline preference, and save it for future use.

Recently there has been a surge of innovative programming that incorporates the use of the Internet. One of the most intriguing offers is from Icon Fitness, that builds both ProForm and NordicTrack treadmills. It is called iFit Live. I could write an entire e-book on this motivational technology, but let me briefly provide a summary.

iFit Live is an interactive technology designed to further motivate you in achieving your fitness goals. Basically, it allows for a 2-way communication between your treadmill and the Internet (Wi-Fi is required). There are two main elements to iFit Live.

Customized Workout Programs

— The most popular aspect of iFit Live is the ability to have personalized workout programs loaded onto your treadmill based on

your fitness goals. For example, let's say you want to lose 10 lbs. in three months. You go to iFit.com and define your goals, and iFit Live will design a series of customized progressive exercises. They will control the speed and incline of your treadmill and provide audio coaching from your choice of personal trainers, including Jillian Michaels. As you workout your treadmill feeds vital stats back to iFit.com, so you can track your progress. If you find



the workout does not satisfy your desired level of exertion, you can increase or decrease the intensity.

Google Maps — NordicTrack partnered with Google in providing an interactive experience that allows you to virtually run throughout the world. In the process your treadmill will simulate the terrain by changing the incline, while you visualize the experience through Google Maps.



This is how it works. You map out a route, either on streets or paths. If Google has a street view you can actually watch as you are running down the street, otherwise you can get the satellite or terrain view. To utilize this feature you need a browser display. For most of the sub \$1,500 treadmills that means you have to either place your laptop or smart phone on the console. All NordicTrack treadmills in excess of \$1,500 come with a built-in tablet with an Android browser.

I tried this intriguing technology and was able to run down a street in my neighborhood and I could see familiar sites. Meanwhile the treadmill adjusted the incline as I ran up hills. In fact, several of the ProForm and NordicTrack models have the ability to both incline and decline the deck, giving you the sensation of running up and down hills. In addition to defining your own route, there is also a library of popular routes through cityscapes and National Parks.

One last feature of iFit Live is the NordicTrack sponsored races where you can compete against other iFit users. You can view your position in relation to the leader and the pack. Their last race had 2,000 participants.

You will also find variations of interactive motivational technology on Smooth, LiveStrong and LifeSpan treadmills, where you can create programs and track your results online. This is done through the use of a USB drive that you connect to your treadmill and then connect to your computer.

The question is, will you use these interactive features? I personally prefer using the manual controls and adjusting the speed and incline. I have no desire to run through Central Park or have Jillian Michaels nag me, but that is my preference. Although I appreciate the ability to track my progress.

Display

Most treadmills have either an LCD or an LED display. In the past the LED display was preferable, but recent improvements in LCD quality make either an acceptable choice. The display usually provides feedback on various stats like time, speed, distance, incline, calories burned and heart rate. Some provide images of a quarter mile track so you can visualize your progress.

Icon Fitness has recently been offering treadmills with built-in full-color touch screen Android browser tablets. This allows you to surf the web, in addition to getting the full benefits of iFit live.

HEART RATE CONTROL

The majority of treadmills that I would classify for runners includes heart rate control. This features allows the level of your exertion to be determined by your heart rate. You utilize a wireless chest strap that monitors your heart rate and communicates that to your treadmill, which in turn increases or decreases the speed based on your targeted rate. This form of training is

popular with professional athletes because it allows you to optimize your workout by keeping your heart rate in a particular zone.

Warranty

The standard warranty coverage for a treadmill of running caliber is lifetime motor, 5-year parts and 2-year labor. There are some exceptions. For example, Smooth has increase their entry level running treadmill, the Smooth 7.35, to 7 year parts. And a couple of the high-end models offer lifetime parts. With about every manufacturer you can purchase extended warranties. Which may be a consideration if you are a fanatical runner that is going to abuse your machine. Or, if you are going to have multiple users.

OTHER ACCESSORIES

Cooling Fan - You will find fans built into most treadmills. Some offer decent relief, while others are useless. Still, it is nice having a breeze pointed directly at your core.

Speakers and MP3 Input - Speakers are also becoming another standard feature on treadmills. The quality of the sound can vary. For example, the speakers on the Sole treadmills are tolerable, while the sound system on the higher priced NordicTrack, ProForm, Yowza and Smooth treadmills is respectable.

What Should You Pay for a Treadmill?

The good news is that the quality of treadmills has vastly improved over the years, and of course, since all the manufacturing has moved to Asia, the

prices have dropped. Precor and Icon Fitness are some of the few companies that still manufacturer in the U.S.A.

So what should you pay for a running treadmill? And I am talking about a treadmill where the user will run in excess of 6 mph. We'll it depends on a couple of factors.

- Your Weight
- Hours Per Week of Usage
- Number of Users

I would suggest a good starting price for a running treadmill is around \$1,499. That is not to say that you cannot get by for less. However, considering the abuse that comes with running, you start compromising on the durability and the running experience. Brands to consider at this price range are:

- Smooth
- NordicTrack
- Sole
- Yowza
- LiveStrong
- ProForm
- LiveStrong
- LifeSpan

If you are a serious user, someone who runs on a treadmill daily, or if you have multiple users, you may want to upgrade to a treadmill in the \$2,000+ price range. The brands above all have treadmills at around \$2,000. In addition, you have some entry level Precor treadmills.

For those who want the best of the best, there are commercial grade treadmills for the home. There are a number of companies to consider, with prices starting at around \$3,000. Most of these brands also sell treadmills that are utilized in commercial settings. Consequently, you are getting machines that have components tested and abused in a commercial environment. And in this price range, these treadmills typically provide a superior running experience. For example, Precor has their *Integrated Footplant Technology*, that claims to "preserves your natural gait by accommodating foot speed changes that occur with every step." Brands that sell residential commercial grade treadmills include:

- Precor
- True
- Star Trac
- LifeFitness
- Landice

For individual treadmill reviews and recommendations you can go to my web site at <http://www.Treadmill-Ratings-Reviews.com>.

WHERE TO BUY A RUNNING TREADMILL

You have basically three choices in purchasing a treadmill:

- Fitness Equipment Specialty Stores
- Large Retail and Sporting Goods Stores
- Online Web Sites

Fitness equipment specialty stores is where you will find many commercial grade models for the home, although many of these same manufacturers sell direct and online. One of the benefits of a specialty fitness retail

businesses is that their salespeople tend to be very professional and knowledgeable. Although you often pay a premium because of the overhead of a small retail business.

Large retail and sporting goods stores like Sears and Dick's Sporting Goods offer the moderate priced running treadmills like Sole, ProForm, NordicTrack, and LiveStrong. In the past, the staff was often clueless and indifferent. Companies like Sears and Dick's are doing a better job in training their staff about the intricacies of a treadmill, and matching the right model to the right user. But at times it can be hit or miss.

Just about all of the treadmills mentioned above are available through either web sites like Amazon, or directly from the manufacturer web site. The sites usually offer details on the specs, so you can better shop and compare. In addition, it is more convenient to do price comparisons. You will find customer reviews on many sites, but obviously they have been cherry-picked.

Most online sales include free shipping, but be aware that the service is typically to your front curb. If the treadmill is delivered in a smaller truck they may drop it off in your garage if you ask real nice. Running treadmills are generally very heavy (200+ lbs.) and you may want to upgrade to an inside delivery option. You'll find it takes 1-2 hours to assemble the treadmill, and you may need two people for certain parts of the assembly.

So the next step is to select a model that is aligned with your budget, your body and your fitness goals. As mentioned, to further assist you, you can visit my site at www.Treadmill-Ratings-Reviews.com. There are reviews on both treadmill brands and individual models. I also track prices and current

coupons. If you have specific questions you can contact me at info@treadmill-ratings-reviews.com.

Good luck on your treadmill hunting!

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