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We've been promised a revolution in wearable computing for at least the last couple of years. Early entrants such as the Pebble and Samsung Gear series - along with a handful of other lesser-known offerings - have given us a glimpse into a connected future in which we are free from the burden of constant smartphone verification. In this new mobile world, wearable computers will send appropriate, context-sensitive alerts to us through devices that are worn on our bodies. Wearable revolution promised to we are tired of the need to constantly check our smartphones ... even if it meant we were only looking at another, smaller device on our wrist, not. Android Wear is Google's first real foray into this new frontier of wearable devices, debuting on new smartwatches from LG and Samsung, with more followings from Motorola and others later this year. These products have been a long time coming, and they come at a time when Pebble has already proven the viability of smartwatches as a product category, but the long-awaited Apple iWatch has yet to materialize. So, after what seems like an eternity, does Android Wear represent the dawn of the mainstream era of smartwatches? Read on to find out how we take a deeper look at the software side of Android Wear. We are publishing this review two weeks after the first Android Wear equipment became available to members of Google I/O. I (Alex Doby) were using UK retailer G Watch about a week at the time of writing. Phil Nickinson and Jerry Hildenbrand have been using the LG G Watch and Samsung Gear Live respectively since I/O. This review is based on impressions of all three of it. For the purposes of this review, we are looking at the initial release of Android Wear - Android 4.4W, build KMV78V - as it works on G Watch and Gear Live. Some Gear Live watches have since received an update to the new build, the KMV78X, however this update has not yet hit all the devices, and it is unclear what is new in it at the time of writing. The first round watch of Android Wear, the Moto 360, is expected to start later this summer and we'll have more to say once we get our hands on this device. Before we get to the proper review, let's take a step back and look at what the Android Wear platform really is. Android Wear is an offshoot of Google's mobile OS, a new branch of Android (Android 4.4W in particular) designed to work on small-scale wearable devices such as smartwatches. Just like the Pebble or Gear 2 line, wearable running Android Wear connects to Android (4.3 Jelly Bean or above) phone via Bluetooth connection, allowing notifications from the phone to be displayed on the watch. But Android Wear is much more than just a mirror for your phone's notification tray. For the most part, it's full Android, which means that the watch itself can run specially designed applications. A normal way to get apps on wrist by downloading them from Google Play on your phone, after which the Android Wear component syncs with the watch via Bluetooth. The top-level screen shows pending notifications from apps on your phone, as well as alerts from apps that live directly on the watch. And since the on-screen keyboards on the tiny watch display aren't exactly perfect, most typing tasks are handled through Google's voice recognition service. Unlike Android phones and tablets, Google controls the entire software experience on all Android Wear devices, so you won't find any manufacturer settings on the watch other than a handful of apps and watch faces. Software updates also come directly from Google, as happens on Nexus and Google Play devices. The hardware may be different, but the software is the only pure Google experience. Read more: Everything you need to know about Android Wear For what is still a very new category of devices, Google has done a great job of smoothing the process of getting an Android Wear smart watch up and running. Once the first power on the watch you will be directed to download the Android Wear app for your phone, and this app in turn will help you through the Bluetooth pairing process. From there you will be given a quick tour of the Android Wear app, a phone-based controller for wearables that allows you to manage apps and preferences. We've reset our devices a few times in the last few days and we still haven't run into trouble with them tuning in again from scratch. Once you are done, a short tutorial on the clock will make sure you are familiar with all the different gestures to wake up the gadget by putting it back into low power mode, and working your way through the different types of on-screen cards you come through. While the pairing process itself is as simple as we might have hoped, it's worth noting that you can't have one watch paired with multiple phones as you can with Pebble. (For reasons that become apparent when you consider that the watch app is pulled from apps over the phone.) In fact, if you want to pair the watch with another phone you will need to perform a reset plant and go through the original installation over and over again. This may seem like a drastic step, but the installation process itself is relatively painless, taking only a minute or two to complete. If you plan to rock multiple Android Wear devices with one phone, however, you should not face any problems. And of course, it's Android Wear, and so these watches only work with Android phones and tablets. At a recent Google I/O-style developer conference, there was no indication of any plans for these wearables from iOS or any other Given how Android Wear works at the software level, we won't be holding our breath to support iOS anytime soon. More: How to customize Android Wear watch Android Wear user interface is all about card cards swipes, around Google Now - Google's predictive search feature - you'll be right at home with an early Android Wear watch. Maps are used to submit notifications or apps, and you can scroll up or down. Swiping right will fire the app or notice, just like throw a card in Google Now. The main face of the watch is displayed at the top of all your cards, and there are several digital and analog options to choose from, with a different amount of space below to allow you to peek into the top card in the stack. For the most part, however, these top-original faces look not all that inspiring. Swiping down from the face of the watch allows you to see the current date and battery level, and activate the dumb control that stops the watch from buzzing you with notifications while it is active. (Swipe down again to turn off the mute function.) As you'd expect, google search and voice action are a huge part of the Android Wear experience. Say GOOD, Google anytime the clock is awake and voice search will spring into action, allowing you to search the web or perform certain tasks on the watch. For example, you can set alarms, reminders, send text messages, or move to a specific location using Google Maps. For the most part, commanding Android Wear with your voice works very well, especially when it comes to running apps or placing calls. But transcription of a message in itself can be a hit and miss from time to time, which is frustrating when there is no alternative method of input. (Ironically, one phrase Google voice transcription seems to struggle with, at least in UK English, is G Watch.) Alternatively, you can click on the watch's main face to bring up the speech menu directly. From there, you can swipe down to view the full list of commands and choose one, not to mention but clearly voice control, so Google expects most users to communicate with their watch. It's good and bad. For the most part, Android Wear does a decent job of designing what we want to do, but you'll still look and feel like an idiot (or perhaps a super-amazing, leathery, 1980s young loner on a crusade to stand up for the cause of innocent, helpless, powerless, world criminals who work above the law) speak in your hours in public. What's more, non-voice options are just not that comfortable to get to. The menu to run apps is at least four tap away at any given time. And the Settings menu is also making it difficult to achieve important elements of brightness control. (Bafflingly, there is no ambient light sensor and therefore no automatic brightness option on Gear Live or G Watch.) The ability to launch apps is a major feature Wear it, but it's an opportunity that is strangely confused if you're not the kind of person who tends to talk to your electronics. This is a problem for developers as well as users - why look for time to create an all-singing, all-dancing watch app if it's out of sight most of the time? At least the top-level maps are relatively fast and easy to navigate, but we really wanted to see more attention paid to the app menu on the watch. After all, this is a big part of what sets Android Wear apart from competing platforms. On the other hand, perhaps this is really what Google intends, with the watch really serving as an accessory, accompanying and enhancing the app experience. It is likely as normal consumers will see such a device and this is something that those of us who live and breathe Android will have to remember. While the Android Wear user interface may seem like a maze of napkins from the beginning, over time you will begin to build a mental map of where everyone lives in the software, and as we said, the customization process does a good job of explaining how different swipe gestures work. But there is some work to be done in making certain things easier to get to. Forcing users to navigate multiple layers of menu just to change a simple setup or run an app just seems like a bad design. The Android Wear smartwatch is touted as always on gadgets, but the display isn't fully lit all the time. When it's idle, it switches to low power mode always on, which displays the main monochrome contours of the selected dial, including any space for the first notification card. To keep the battery charge, it also dials back the brightness of the display significantly, to the point where it is almost indecipherable in bright light. There are several ways to completely wake up the display. The first, which is also the easiest and most reliable, is to simply click on the screen. Android Wear motion sensors can also detect when you raise your hand up to look at your watch, and this will light up the display when you do so too. The only problem is the position in which it is activated to kick and skip. Sometimes it is activated too quickly. Other times you shake your hand and finally just click on the display. The Android Wear watch will automatically switch back to display mode for a few seconds at all; To make the transition manually, you can cover the screen with your palm. This may seem like a strange move at first, but it works reliably and it feels like a natural way to put the device to sleep. (We got it to work just fine with one finger as well.) While you can run apps On Android Wear smartwatches, most of the hard work is done by your phone through the Phone-based Android Wear companion app. Like Android on your phone or tablet, Android Wear is configured to allow you to use different apps to perform different tasks. That's why when you start running Presented a selection of apps to use with voice-controlled smart watches such as Set alarm or Call in a taxi. If there's more than one app to perform the task - which is the case with pulse monitoring and stopwatch on Samsung Gear Live - this is where you can choose which one you want to use. Right now, just a week or so after launch, there aren't too many options. But expect this menu to become increasingly important as more third-party Android Wear apps get there. (And there's a big link to View Compatible Apps that sends you to a list showing 30 or so Google-curated wear apps currently on the Play Store.) The settings menu in the app allows you to disable notifications from certain apps, but only one at a time. And as we discuss in the next section, you can't filter notifications from apps based on specific criteria - it's either on or off for each application. Other options include being able to switch mode always on the screen, hide a small preview of the map when the screen is darkened and silence the phone when the watch is connected. And that's basically him. There's no menu to download individual apps on the watch, as watch apps are designed to be pushed through automatically once a colleague's phone is installed. For the most part it's good. While power users may crave more control over what is on their devices, the way wear is currently working allows seamless apps to experience through the watch and phone. Other settings, such as brightness, airplane mode, and various developer variants, can be found in the Settings app on the watch. Notifications on the wrist for smartwatches that email in your pocket were for early smartphones. Being able to look down and act via email, text or social update without pulling your phone, making smartwatches really useful, not just a novelty. For the most part, support for Android Wear notifications is solid. He refers to the Android Notifications listener system to show details of notifications in the watch layout presented in the Google trademark layout. Most notifications will buzz your wrist and pull the watch out of your always-on-screen mode, allowing you to instantly see the contents of the notification. Messages take on a bit of visual flair too, including parts of the app or the contact icon behind the card for quick recognition. Other alerts, such as calendar notifications and weather, use more general background art. Most Android apps will just work with Android Wear, showing you on your wrist exactly what you will see on your phone or tablet, accompanied by Drone. If nothing else, they will give you the opportunity to open the app on your phone. Apps that are optimized for Android Wear, however, can also show additional options. For example, in Google Hangouts, you can respond to messages by voice input, as well as in you archive the unimportant mail directly on the watch. But there is no way to return the card, which you may have accidentally rejected, and there is no Pebble-style menu history notifications to look for earlier alerts. And as the swipe from the notice on the watch also rejects it on the phone, you have to be careful with frequent napkins. Android Wear is a powerful tool for quick bypassing with a flurry of notifications you may encounter during the day, but with this force as they say, comes responsibility. And there are a few other quibbles that make Managing Android Wear notifications less perfect. There is no way to know in Gmail which account the message was sent if you have multiple Google accounts. And it's not possible to swipe away individual emails that are grouped together on the display clock - it's all or nothing. There's also the problem of controlling which notifications are sent on the watch. Most Android Central editors receive tons of emails and other notifications every day, some of them more important than others. And while you can stop some apps from sending notifications to your watch, it would be nice to see more detailed control over which messages can buzz your wrist. For example, an email from a friend or family member should be given more attention than a random press release. You could argue, however, that this is where quick, glanceable notifications come in. However, many email notifications quickly clutter the tiny display of the smartwatch. Android Wear apps and features out of the box, Android Wear is a selection of apps, and Spartan. Major apps and maps include: Agenda: Tracks your Google Calendar meetings on your wrist. Compass: a self-evident app based on the watch's internal digital compass. Fit: Tracks your steps taken every day and heart rate readings on devices that support it. World Watch: Creating a map showing you time in one or more cities around the world is useful if you're traveling abroad. Maps: Activated with navigation ... keywords, this brings up the direction of movement on the watch and phone. You can bring up pedestrian directions too, however, to get these you need to start navigating with your phone and specifically choose this option. Others, including Google Keep's own app, can be downloaded from Google Play. As with any new platform, it will take time and hours of development to flesh out the Android Wear app portfolio. Right now, 30 or so apps out there already cover a wide range of features - from viewing boarding passes to American Airlines and Delta apps, to Taxi rides via Lyft to follow recipes on your wrist with Allthecooks app recipes. Out of the box may be focused on notifications, but it is third-party developers who will provide real killer apps for Android Wear in the coming months. It shouldn't have happened. Google Now's smartwatch made too much sense not to be implemented through Android Wear. You won't be able to see every Google Now map on your wrist - and it's not necessarily a bad thing - but important updates such as weather maps and transit directions will follow you around. On the other hand, you can also find yourself constantly swiping from Google Now maps that don't really matter to you. We're looking to make it smarter over time. Like its smartphone counterpart, the usefulness of Google Now on a smartwatch will depend on where you live and how many Google services you use. But expect more Google Now functionality to be rolled into Android Wear as the predictive search app continues to grow. The built-in Fit app lets you track your steps and view historical step data over time, as well as your heart rate if you use a watch that supports it. The Fit app lets you customize your daily pitch goal and get a greeting card when you hit that target. The app is part of the Google Fit platform, which is not widely available at the moment, and as such, if you plant reset the clock, then your step data disappears into oblivion. And unfortunately, we've also noticed that the current crop of Android Wear devices seems to overestimate the number of steps taken compared to pedometer sensors in other smartwatches and wearable devices. Read more: Tracking steps with Android Wear Music controls Google Play Music and some other music apps bring album art and song details on your wrist, along with swipeable controls for pause/playback and forward/back track controls. However, there are no volume controls or extended playlist views. While its potential is clear to see, it's still early days for Android Wear and wearable computing in general. Currently, this explicit version of the 1.0 OS runs on version 1.0 hardware - the current crop of Android-powered watches comparable to early phones like the T-Mobile G1 and THE OG Motorola Droid. Most of what works there, but they are products that work against the technological limitations of the time, as well as an OS that is still adapting to the new form factor. In many ways this is in stark contrast to the mature Android experience we see on phones and tablets today. Generally speaking, Google's wrist-based notification experience is well done, but there are issues to work elsewhere and plenty of room for improvement across the board. On the app watch is difficult to achieve without the use of voice action. As the power of users we would see some more subtle control over the types of notifications that are displayed, and an easy way to deal with the dismissed cards. And the activation angle to wake up the screen can use some adjustment adjustments These are the kinds of refinements we hope to see from future versions of Android Wear. It's not necessarily the end of the world that they're missing from the original release, although it bears a mention though. As imperfect as current Android Wear software is, hardware launch is perhaps a big problem. Both LG G Watch and Samsung Gear Live use displays that, for all intents and purposes, are useless in direct sunlight. You will need crank brightness in general to see anything at all in bright conditions, and this is made all the more disappointing due to the lack of ambient light sensors in the current Android Wear hardware, which means that there is no automatic brightness option. Instead you have to go through five layers of menu to change the level of brightness every time you go outside, and it's not just a good user experience. There have been complaints about Android Wear's battery life too, especially compared to Pebble, which can last up to five days to charge. Personally, I can live with the battery performance I get from the LG G Watch - one day with relative ease, two days of max - but for me the display issue is almost a deal breaker, and it the display is the reason I need more advanced smartwatch displays or batteries to change that. In addition, the hardware designs of Samsung and LG, to put it mildly, are basic and utilitarian. Perhaps the more raunchy Moto 360 - the Android smartwatch that has turned most heads so far - will spice things up a bit. As we said in our reviews, there is little sex appeal to be found on the hardware side. We may finally be reaching the dawn of the smartwatch era, but nowadays, Android Wear watches niche products for early adopters - ultra-connected enthusiasts who want an early look at where this technology is headed. Thus, those hoping for a quantum leap ahead of existing Pebble and Gear devices may be disappointed. Now Android Wear is more like a baby step beyond these devices, and it will take advances in hardware and software before Android becomes universal on your wrists like this in your pockets. Despite this, the potential of Android Wear and the apps it will allow to see clearly and we will look both with interest in the months ahead. Read more: LG G Watch review, Samsung Gear Live review, Moto 360 hands-on We can earn commissions for purchases using our links. Learn more. More.