

Timex Watches Out for iPod

With its Ironman iControl watch, the timepiece maker has created a reliable, accessible (in more ways than one) option for iPod control

by Arik Hesseldahl

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Editor's Rating: ★★★★★

The Good: Straightforward and easy to use

The Bad: Bulky receiver should be smaller

The Bottom Line: Twist and turn for on-the-go iPod control no more



Raise your hand if you've ever felt like this: You're walking along with an iPod playing music in your ears, and the player itself is in a pocket, a purse, or the compartment of a bag—a lousy song comes on and you'd like to either turn it down or skip it and go to the next one. This scenario is further complicated if you're exercising—when the player is likely in an out-of-the-way armband or fanny pack—as the maneuver generally calls for stopping whatever activity you're engaged in.

You have two options: Wait for the song to end or wrestle the player out from wherever it is and advance the song yourself.

Apple ([AAPL](#)) and other makers of MP3 players have tried to address this mild inconvenience in a variety of ways over the years. Apple sells in-line remote controllers—including one with an FM radio—that give consumers a small, unobtrusive device to clip on clothes and use to advance back and forth through songs and to control volume.

The iPod shuffle itself is a player built in just such a shape; it's about the size of a large money clip. Even Sony ([SNE](#)), creator of the Walkman and Discman portable music players, created matchbook-size controllers that extended the headphone cord somewhat and added a degree of on-the-fly control.

Wrist Control

But as the billion-dollar iPod accessory business has proved time and again, there are many ways to get a job done. Watchmaker [Timex](#) has come up with a rather elegant and straightforward solution that will have some appeal. Why not control the iPod with a wristwatch?

Once you've tried it, as I did with the Timex Ironman iControl watch for iPod, it seems a head-slappingly obvious trick that makes one wonder why no one ever thought of it before, even before the iPod.

Four buttons on the watch's face allow you to move forward and back through tracks, and raise and lower the volume, while a fifth button—the most prominent—allows you to alternate playing or pausing a song.

The Ironman iControl comes with a small radio receiver that translates the radio signals from the watch into commands the iPod understands. The receiver inserts into the dock connector at the bottom of the player and works with fifth-generation iPods (the video versions), the iPod nano, and the iPhone when it's set in "airplane" mode, meaning cell-phone service is turned off.

Sizing It Up

The receiver measures just a bit more than an inch long and wide, and is actually a bit thicker than the iPod nano I used it with. My first criticism is that it seems the RECEIVER should be smaller than it is. The more appropriate size, I think, would be closer to that of the receiver Apple and Nike ([NKE](#)) designed for the Nike + iPod Sport Kit, released in 2006. (Meanwhile, it goes without saying that during exercise, you can't use the iControl watch with an iPod nano at the same time as the Nike + iPod Sport

Kit.)

That said, the setup works perfect. There are no complicated instructions or software to install. Plug the receiver into the iPod, and as long as the watch is in its time mode—that is, displaying the time of day and not the stopwatch screen, for instance—the controls work perfectly. I cycled through an entire album and then back again with ease, and raised and lowered the volume as well. The buttons it uses for iPod control are used to control the stopwatch, set the alarm, and do all the other things you'd expect from an Ironman watch. The combination of the watch and the receiver goes for \$125, which strikes me as about \$25 too high, but I also expect the price to fall over the next few months.

It did come with sort of a silly, futuristic sky-blue band. It comes in several colors, including gray. I would have preferred wearing a more conservatively designed watch, but that's just me. I don't tend to use an iPod on those rare occasions I inhabit a gym, but I do use it on my way to and from work practically every day. I'd use the Ironman iControl every day if it were just a tad plainer.

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