

# How To Shop For A Treadmill

The following are some "TIPS" provided for our local customers to educate them on how to "shop", "test", and "compare" treadmills and their components (parts). In the past 15 years there has been many manufacturers getting into the fitness industry and producing all kinds of fitness equipment. Treadmills have been one of the most popular pieces of exercise equipment chosen by customers wanting to exercise at home and in health clubs. Please read the following information carefully and if you have any questions, please feel free to ask one of our fitness consultants for a more "In Depth" presentation.



## Where can a customer shop for treadmills?

Treadmills are found in many retail environments such as sporting goods stores, specialty fitness stores, and numerous internet web sites. We highly recommend that you purchase from a location that you can actually get on the product and test it. Comparing a treadmill on paper only or through specifications really does not give you the "feel" or "performance" of any given treadmill. Would you buy a car without driving it first? Get on the treadmill and perform what you are going to be doing on it, whether its just walking or jogging or running - PUT IT TO YOUR TEST!

## What should a customer ask about any given treadmill?

Not one thing makes a treadmill great! All the parts work together to make either a cheap product or a quality product. The cost of a treadmill does reflect how many quality components (parts) go into it. Many people ask about horsepower of the motor and compare greatly on this component alone. The motor is only as good as its lower computer board and the lower computer board and motor life expectancy are directly related to the quality of the belt and deck system used on each treadmill. So there is not (1) specific part that is the most important! Each of the individual parts mentioned above will be discussed more thoroughly later in this guide. Ask about all the parts, not just one! All the parts determine how long it is going to last and perform. Some of the most important questions are not about the treadmill at all, they are about service. Who services the treadmill when it breaks down? Are they local? How long does it take to get a problem fixed? Are parts for each treadmill stocked by the service company? These type of questions really should be weighed in your decision of what treadmill you purchase.

**EXTRA INFORMATION:** Before you make your purchase, ask for the phone number to the service department from whatever company you are thinking of purchasing. Is it a local number? Where are they located? How long does it take for them to respond to a service call? How long to order a part? What good is a \$300, \$500, or \$1,000 purchase if you have a hard time getting service?

## Is it better to buy a "Used" treadmill ?

A used treadmill is a very risky thing to purchase. There are so many mechanical and electric parts! Unfortunately you cannot look at a motor or electronic board and see how much life it has left or how much it was used. The same goes for belts, decks, and roller bearings - you just can't tell what life is left or what life was taken from the machine from it's use. There really is no formula or precise, tactical way to investigate a used treadmill. This does not mean they are not worth purchasing. If someone is not sure they will stay with an exercise regimen or cannot afford a new treadmill, then the purchase of a used treadmill has less liability. However, it is very important again to ask about service on anything used. Is the used product still made? Are parts still available if something breaks down? Who is the service company? Are they local? Many manufacturers do not allow the original warranty to be transferred to a second party and that means more risk to the purchaser of the used treadmill.

## PARTS COMPARISON

### Motor & Horsepower Rating



On any treadmill a consumer is considering, they need to know the continuous duty horsepower rating. Any other form of horsepower rating is unacceptable. Continuous duty rates the motor while under load while other ratings such as peak are not reliable ratings due to it only measuring the horsepower at momentary start up, not under load for any length of time. Even when comparing the continuous rating, not all motors with the same continuous rating are the same. If you look at two different treadmills each with a 2.0 continuous horsepower rating how do you know if one is better than the other? Ask about the RPM's the motor has to perform in order to achieve the continuous rating. For example: one motor might have a 2.0 rating @ 2400 rpm's while the other motor might have a 2.0 rating @ 7200 rpm's. Think the motors are the same? No they are not! The motor that achieves the 2.0 rating at lower rpm's is working less and that means it will last longer. If a motor has to work at higher rpm's to get a certain horsepower rating, the motor will run more hot causing it to wear down. The higher rpm's will also wear out the bearings in the motor prematurely. Better motors cost more money! This comparison is very helpful when a customer is comparing a \$500-\$1000 treadmill to a \$2,000-\$3,000 treadmill. The motors on the literature may say they have the same size horsepower but they are actually very different motors. Another internal part that makes a treadmill motor last longer is the wiring insulation. The higher grade manufacturers use heavier insulation in their motors, therefore they run less hot and more efficiently. If you need, ask to see the physical size of the motor itself. However, a motor can only be strong if it has a good lower computer board (power supply).

### Lower Computer Board ( Power Supply )



Lower computer boards are just as important as motors. The lower computer board supplies the motor with all the information of what is happening on the treadmill. You can have a large motor with a cheap lower computer board and the treadmill will not run well. However, you can have a small motor with a very high quality lower computer board and the treadmill will run fine for a few years. The best is to have a good motor and a good lower computer board. The unfortunate thing about lower computer boards is that you cannot take one out of a treadmill and show differences between them. They all look similar and size is not a real factor of whether it is high quality or not. Again, cost reflects the quality of the components in a treadmill. It sounds like a sales pitch to say "You get what you pay for" but in treadmills it is very true. Cheap lower computer boards can break down each year while high quality lower boards will last many years without failure. Many people ask about motors and the warranty of the motor but the lower computer board is what gives the motor it's power and torque so consumers should ask about the lower computer board warranty too. There are two types of lower computer boards, SCR (silicon controlled rectifier) and PWM (pulse width modulation). There is much debate of which is better however there are many treadmills on the market using both types and service records tend to show they both are long lasting if they are a high quality SCR or PWM board, matched with a good quality motor!

### Frame



Treadmill frames should come with a 30 year or lifetime warranty. Anything less than 30 years is showing the manufacturer does not have "faith" in it's workmanship. A frame gives the treadmill it's "FEEL" when a consumer is walking, jogging, or running. The heavier a frame is, the more stable the treadmill will feel. Ask how much the treadmill weights in total pounds. This includes the motor and all the parts but the majority of the weight is the frame. Some treadmills are built on all steel frames, some on aluminum frames, and others on steel frames with aluminum extrusions. The majority of treadmill manufacturers use steel frames but aluminum is becoming more popular each year. Slowly more manufacturers are moving toward aluminum because of the non rusting issue. However if you buy a steel frame treadmill and it has a 30 year or lifetime warranty on it, you are guaranteed replacement if the frame would rust. The weight of the treadmill must be listed on the literature of each treadmill. Compare them! Some frames look huge but the gauge of steel is very thin so from the appearance it looks bigger but when using it, the treadmill feels unstable. On the other hand, some treadmills look kind of plain and less dynamic but the frames are a heavy gauge steel so it is very solid. Don't be fooled by the looks of the treadmill, compare this specification on the literature and get on each treadmill and feel the stability. For some years there has been misleading information about folding treadmills being more unstable than non-folding treadmills. Again, you need to get on them, fold them up, unfold them, test them! Some are weak due to inferior gauges of steel but quality manuf's use wide frames and heavy gauges of steel to make sure the machine feels solid folded and during use.

**Belt & Deck System**



The belt and deck system on every treadmill are comparable to tires on a car. They are constantly dealing with friction, causing heat related deterioration and breakdown. Things that cause belts & decks to wear out prematurely are dirt, dust, heat, and friction. The belt & deck are constantly rubbing against one another causing friction / heat between each of them. The belt is the surface you are walking/jogging/running on and underneath the belt is the deck. Decks are usually black in color. It is a compressed piece of fiber board with a slick coated top surface to minimize friction. Higher quality belt & deck systems allow the treadmill to operate with less friction due to better lubrication processes. When a belt & deck start to wear down, the motor and lower computer board have to work harder to overcome the extra friction between the belt & deck. These four components (motor, lower computer board, belt & deck) life expectancy are determined by how well the belt & deck were lubricated at the factory and by your home maintenance lubrication schedule. Make sure you get a lubrication schedule in your owner's manual or from your sales representative. By appearance, most belt & deck systems look the same but they are not. You must lift up the belt and inspect the layers of the belt. Thicker belts (except orthopedic belts) will last longer than thinner belts. Thicker decks are better also. You must measure the thickness of the deck to determine if it is strong enough to handle your application. All belt & deck systems will require lubrication anywhere from every month to annually. Be sure to ask what type of lubrication is needed for each treadmill you look at. Does the location you are buying it from have it in stock? How much does it cost? Where can you get it if the company you are buying it from is out of stock? This maintenance is very important. Any workload put on a belt & deck that needs lubrication will cause damage to all the other mechanical and electronic parts, so be sure you can get it when you need it. The belt & deck is where trouble starts with a treadmill and then problems spread from there to other components. The belt & deck are very important parts to take care of over the life of your treadmill. Other periodic maintenance things you will have to do with your belt will be "tracking" which involves adjusting the belt left and right. You will also have to adjust the tension on the belt a few times. All of these things are usually outlined in your owner's manual or are demonstrated by a sales representative.

**EXTRA INFORMATION:** Some manufacturers have started offering "orthopedic" belts on their treadmills. Please be aware that these type of belts are much thicker than most belts and give the treadmill a softer feel. We agree that the benefit of a softer feel is nice however the orthopedic belts have been known to hold heat against the deck for a longer period of time drying out the lubrication system much faster. Make sure if you are considering an orthopedic belt on any treadmill that you follow the lubrication schedule meticulously and make sure the company you are purchasing from keeps the lubrication in stock!

**Rollers**



Rollers are another part that is hard to see on the treadmill unless a person points them out to you. There are two rollers on a treadmill, one located in the front of the treadmill under the hood cover and the rear roller is in the back of the treadmill with most of it covered by the treadmill belt. Bigger rollers have many advantages. A larger roller will extend your belt life simply because it causes the belt to turn on a wider angle, decreasing tension on the seam of the belt. Smaller rollers typically have smaller bearings, the smaller the bearing, the quicker it is going to wear out. If you have three size rollers, (1) 1.8", (1) 2.0", and (1) 2.5" rollers and they are all going 3.5 MPH, which one is going to wear out quicker? The smaller roller is turning faster due to the size, while the larger roller is turning slower. The larger the roller, the better it is on it's bearing life and on the treadbelt life. Lower quality treadmills have straight rollers, meaning they are the same size over the entire surface of the outer roller surface. Higher quality treadmill manufacturers use a "crowned" roller which means it is higher in the middle than it is on the ends. This allows the belt to have more traction and helps keep the treadbelt in the middle of the treadmill's deck easier. If a rear roller is not "crowned", the belt is going to move left or right depending on which foot you push off with the most. If this is not corrected by "tracking" - the belt could be badly damaged when it rubs the frame. A "crowned" roller is more expensive to put on a treadmill but long term it is worth it. Not all bearings are the same either. Better, long lasting bearings are going to cost more than lower grade bearings. Not all bearings are the same - even if they are the same size! Typically the more expensive the treadmill, the better the bearings. A roller is a

part that does not have to be replaced when it goes bad. Unlike belts & decks which have to be replaced in order to save the rest of the treadmill, rollers are not going to affect anything on the treadmill. However, bad bearings make "clicking", "thumping", or "grinding" noises that become annoying especially when you are trying to watch TV while exercising.

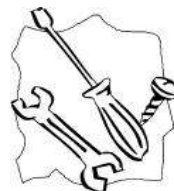
### Upper Computer Display



The upper computer display is the "face" of the treadmill. It is what you are mainly looking at while exercising. There are two types of upper computer displays - LCD ( liquid crystal display ) and LED ( lighted electric diode ) display. An LCD display has a gray background with black numbers. An LED uses red, green, orange, or some kind of colored lights. An LED display typically is more expensive and able to withstand more use or abuse. Many treadmills now have preset programs, custom programs, and heart rate programs. Look at the size of the actual display, most are made of plastic. The display will show time, distance, calories, incline, mph, and heart rate. Many manufacturers use a very large upper display to make the treadmill appear bigger, please realize this mainly plastic part of the treadmill adds very little to the overall weight of the treadmill. Programs that do make the treadmill cost more are Heart Rate Control programs. These programs require the user to wear a wireless transmitter belt around the chest. This relays a signal to the treadmill showing your heart rate and adjusting your incline or speed to put you in your appropriate heart rate zone, maximizing your cardiovascular benefits. Be very aware how lower quality treadmill manufacturers put all kinds of "gadgets" on their display's to take your mind off the most important parts of the treadmill. Displays with CD players, aroma therapy fans, phones, televisions and head phones look attractive but they do nothing to prolong the life of your treadmill! Motors, belts & decks, lower computer boards, etc., make up a treadmill's price - not the gadgets. We are not saying these types of things are not good to help you stay motivated to keep exercising but they are not necessary on the upper display. You can have a very big, oversized, gadget dominated upper display to look at but it will not benefit you if the motor stops working. Keep your focus on the main "Guts" of the treadmill, the components that make it last a long time.

**EXTRA INFORMATION:** Heart rate monitors are very important features of any treadmill purchase. However, many people do not understand what the accuracy is for the many different styles. "Hand-Touch" or "Hand Grip" involve putting your hands on two round electrodes. This type of heart rate reading is normally about 85% accurate when standing still, but if you are moving (and most people are when on a treadmill) the accuracy goes down to about 55%. The most accurate form of heart rate readings are the wireless chest straps. These take the heart rate off the chest above the heart and have been proven to be 98.5% accurate. The least accurate are "Finger Tip" and "Ear Clip" styles still found on many lower end treadmills. Your finger tips and ear lobes are so far away from your heart that the accuracy is very low. Many of these types even state in their owner's manuals that the accuracy can be thrown off by things such as movement! Go Figure! Movement - isn't that what you are supposed to do when exercising? The absolute worst is "Thumb Pulse." Talk to any doctor or nurse and ask them if you ever take someone's pulse with your thumb - they will tell you NO! Your thumb has a slightly different pulse rate than your true pulse, therefore it cannot be trusted. Here is another example of why "Hand Touch" is not as accurate also. When you grip the "Hand Grip" style, does your thumb rest on the electrode? Yes it does! All these reasons point to someone either getting a wireless transmitter belt style on the treadmill or purchasing a free standing unit that can be used on any cardiovascular product.

### Service



When you are purchasing a new product of any kind, many people neglect to ask about how the product will be serviced if it breaks down. Treadmills are like automobiles, they are going to break down. There are many things you can do to help prevent breakdowns but eventually parts will need to be replaced. Local service is the most beneficial for any

( Service - continued )

consumer. Before you purchase any treadmill, find out how to get service on the treadmill you are purchasing. Ask the following questions: Where is the service company located? How long does it take to get a service technician to your house when a breakdown occurs? Are parts stocked for quick repair times? Ask for the service phone number so you can call the number and see if there is a problem getting through. Ask how long they have been servicing treadmills? Is the service company associated with the store you are purchasing it from or a subcontractor? Service for your treadmill is just as important to ask about as the components for the treadmill. How good is a treadmill that costs \$500, \$1,000, or \$2,000 if you can't get it serviced when it breaks down?

### **Our History, Our Future, Our Story - Exercise & Leisure Equipment Company**

In 1936, Franklin Delano Roosevelt was the President of the United States, the book Gone With The Wind was published and a man named Art Becker from Northern Kentucky started a company called Health Equipment Company. He sold a product called "The Exercycle" door to door for years. Once the business built up enough customers, he opened a store in Norwood Ohio. He added more products like treadmills, bikes, and gyms to sell to commercial facilities to help the company grow. Each year business got bigger and bigger. Art's two son's Mark and Jerry entered the business in the late 1970's to help the company grow even more. They renamed the company Exercise and Leisure Equipment Company and opened a mega store located in Columbia Township - Ohio to showcase fitness in a grand fashion. In the 1980's fitness and health started to become a main concern to people due to illnesses related to lack of exercise. Jerry's two son's went to college and began to work in the family business in the late 1980's / early 1990's. In 1994 Exercise and Leisure Equipment Company expanded back to where it had started in Northern Kentucky. Our Ft. Mitchell location showcases the highest quality residential fitness equipment brands on the market. Fitness equipment categories like treadmills, elliptical machines, bikes, climbers, rowers, free weight benches, home gyms, etc are on display for customers to try out and ask questions. Exercise and Leisure Equipment Company has been the tri-states resource for home and commercial fitness equipment for many years. Come in and see 70+ years of experience in our company details. Here are just a few of them:

- # 1 Our "FITNESS TEAM" is educational about helping you make the correct purchase, not selling you on a piece of equipment. Meaning we will give you the information to help you make a decision based on product facts and exercise regimens. You make the decision to buy yourself, not "pushed" by a salesperson.
- # 2 "In-Home" installation and delivery are offered on most of our products. Some restrictions do apply! Ask about details when in our store. Our delivery crew(s) are employees who work for us, not subcontractors. We come to your home, in our company trucks and company uniforms. No need to worry about "some assembly required" with Exercise & Leisure - we make it look easy.
- # 3 Service is second to none! Every person who purchases a product from Exercise and Leisure will have access to our service department when it is needed. Again, no subcontractors here! They come to your home in company service vans and company uniforms. Most service calls are responded to within 72 hours.

Exercise & Leisure Equipment Company - "On our third generation: growing & going strong." -

**Randy Becker**

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