

Oh, you better watch out . . . : The clock is ticking, so check out the latest wrist-gadgets

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At long last, high-tech watch manufacturers moved beyond function for function's sake, and imbued this year's selection of wrist-worn wonders with style. Technology truly is ubiquitous when it takes a back seat to form, and this year you can sport the geekiest watch in the room and still receive compliments on its appearance.

Suunto X91

Suunto, the force from Finland, offers another in its long line of thoughtful sports wrist computers: the X91 is the ultimate wanderer's tool.

The X91's built-in global positioning system takes advantage of newly deployed GPS satellites, and offers faster uplinks, higher accuracy, altimeter, 3D compass and all the usual bells and whistles packed with a newly designed mobile phone style interface. And if you really want to find your way around, you can plan your trip on your laptop and download it: the X91 is compatible with National Geographic's official topological maps. \$499.

Junghans Mega 1000 Atomic

Atomic watches, which receive a time signal from atomic clocks, are so 2004. The latest breed from German manufacturer Junghans can calibrate with atomic clocks in four venues: Mainflingen, Germany; Fort Collins, Colo., and the two atomic clocks in Japan. The Mega 1000 also features dual time zones, a synchronization meter, and is waterproof. \$260. (Similar models include the Seiko Brightz worldwide atomic watch and the Casio Triple-region Waveceptor.)

Tissot High T

One of the most attractive and feature-laden treatments for Microsoft's SPOT technology (an on-demand information feed from MSN Direct) is Tissot's titanium T-Touch. This remarkable watch features a touch sapphire crystal with all features user-controlled via its tactile touch screen. It has several programmable vibrating alarms, bright backlight, stopwatch, large LCD screen, rechargeable battery and a heavy duty case that puts a Rolex to shame. \$725.

Cathode Corner Nixie Watch

By far the simplest watch in this roundup, the Nixie, simply pays homage to all things geek by turning old-school Nixie cathode display tubes (ask your science teacher) into a statement. The tubes are replaceable, and the watch has a programming adapter that even allows it to be hacked by the owner to modify the functions. \$395.

Suunto D9 Dive Watch

Suunto has created the world's first dive computer that could masquerade as a real watch. The D9 is an incredible looking device that integrates a compass, wireless air gauge, thermometer, surface timer, nitrogen flying monitor and depth and pressure gauges. This wireless wonder maintains a dive manager that can be stored on your PC through a USB cable. The D9 effectively replaces a bulky traditional instrument cluster with a sleek titanium-housed wrist-worn high-tech tool. The price is not available.

DoCoMo Wristomo

While not yet available in the United States, the DoCoMo Wristomo is included in this roundup because it is a look at what a real, working wrist-phone is -- and one day we may actually have our own. The device is made by Seiko, and actually uncurls from your wrist for use as a full-size handset. It provides access to location-based content such as restaurants and weather, and syncs with your PC. Keep your fingers crossed. This may make your RAZR or PEBL look as dated as the brick phone if we ever get our wrists on one!

Mio Shape Select Strapless Heart-Rate Monitor

Heart-rate monitors are a fantastic idea except for the uncomfortable strap that has to be moistened and worn around the user's chest. The Mio Shape monitor works like monitors on health club machines: through sensors located adjacent to the watch's face. The Mio Shape Select doesn't keep a running track of heart rates, but it is a lot easier to run in. \$29.95.

TAG Heuer Haute Couture

Creating a unique melding of jewelry and technology, Heuer has embedded 54 LEDs in a watch set with 879 Top Wesselton (5.8 carats), full cut, VS/SI (1.1 mm) diamonds. The time displays in glowing red. Very limited production. The price is not available.

Camco Prostar Car Key Wristwatch

OK, admit it, you've always wanted to control a car like Pierce Brosnan, so here's your chance. Want to open and start your car without reaching for the keys? Strap on the Camco Prostar, developed in the Netherlands, and just hit your wrist. The Camco works up to 3,000 feet from your car, and provides everything from automatic trunk opening, panic button, starter disabler, cabin temperature check and silent arming. This monster has 40 auto-related features and requires a receiver that can be installed in virtually any car. About \$317. Steve Lundin is CEO of Bigfrontier Communications Group in Chicago.

Color Photo: Jim Frost, Sun-Times / Steve Lundin checks a map against the Suunto X91 (inset), which has a built-in global positioning system. Lundin reviews the latest technology available in watches.

Color Photo: DoCoMo Wristomo

Color Photo: Mio Shape Select Strapless Heart-Rate Monitor

Color Photo: TAG Heuer Haute Couture

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