

The Nike+iPod

I'm a sucker for functional technology. I like music, though I spend most, if not all my listening time while driving to and from the office. And obviously I like – OK, love - to run. Since I'm a fan of both, you'd think that I'd caught on the portable MP3 movement sometime ago. However I'd always been one who believes in the purity of running. Just give me comfortable apparels, socks and shoes please, thank you.

That was until work forced me to put my running in the back seat. That made each session that I can scrounge out of hectic schedule extra special. And when I discovered how cute and innocuous the new iPod Shuffle is, I re-discovered the fun part of running as well. OK, Apple make one hell of a cool product too. Now, if I'd known that the giants of sports and personal lifestyle marketing were planning something, I'd have switched my purchase to the iPod Nano. Ask anyone who is into fitness which sporting company designs the coolest shoes, apparels and taglines, chances are they'll tell you Nike and which company produces computers that really work and MP3 players that don't look like mini cigars or cheroots, they'll tell you Apple. What happens when these 2 decide to get hitched? You get the Nike+iPod. And you can imagine my excitement when Nike Sales Malaysia invited me to be one of the very first in the country to take these babies out for a run, literally.

Look good, perform even better

Nike's foray into fitness oriented personal music player isn't new. They've worked with Philips briefly but the designs were just too bulky and the unit is basically just an portable MP3 player. The Nike+iPod



is the first time where the MP3 player integrates with the shoe. To ramp up its cool factor, it even provides you with a choice of a male or female audio feedback. Before we get to the low-downs, here's what you need. An iPod Nano, a Nike+iPod Sport Kit (consisting of a cute oval-shaped



sensor and a wireless receiver) and a pair of Nike+ capable shoe such as the Air Zoom Moire, a lightweight Nike Free-based trainer, which is already in the market. Soon it will be joined by the Air Zoom Plus, Air Max Moto+, Nike Shox

Turbo OH+, Air Max 180+, Nike Shox Navina+ and Air Max 90+.

These shoes are special in that a bit of the midsole have been hollowed out (picture on the right) to accommodate the iPod sensor. The product specs say that the sensor is waterproof. However to keep it small, robust and watertight, the sensor's battery is sealed and non-replaceable. Battery life is approximately 1,000 hours. That means if you run an hour every day, the sensor should last you nearly 3 years.

What's all that technology if you're not accessorized? Worry not, trust it to Nike to create a range of Nike+ outfits (coming soon!) that have special pockets to hold the iPod and the earphone wires.

Easy Peasy

To get connected, remove the insole from the shoe and take out the rubber plug covering the sensor hole. Place the sensor in it. Then plug the receiver to the iPod Nano and do a quick feet shuffling (pun intended) to sync-detect your iPod and the sensor.



7-time Tour de France winner, Lance Armstrong and Women's World Record Holder for the Marathon, Paula Radcliffe are fans of the Nike+iPod

You'll then see Nike+iPod listed in the main menu. At this point you might choose to calibrate your unit by running a fixed distance and setting the data into the iPod. This will enable a more accurate logging of your workouts. Just so that you didn't rush out of the house eager to try the coolware (is there such a word?) out, remember to load your playlist! If you choose not to, you'll still get the audio feedback in regular intervals, except that you won't be listening to your music tracks.

Don't forget your PowerSong!

Before you set off on your run, you might want to set your personal preferences such as weight, target distance, and also your PowerSong (not unlike the penguins' Heartsong in Happy Feet). As with the birds' Heartsong, your PowerSong is supposed to spur you on to get over the tough parts of your workouts. You can trigger your PowerSong simply by pressing and holding the center button on your iPod. Since it's an MP3 player at its core, you can load a wide range of stuff, besides music, into it. For example, fitness programs and podcasts.

Get jiggy with it!

I started my workout pretty late in the morning – 11am! It was real hot but I've been logging enough hard sessions into my training to withstand the discomfort, at least for my target distance of 3K. After being directed to a nice track surrounding The Curve, I set off in the new Air Triax 10, a stability trainer. The route was pretty challenging but the audio feedback and the great tunes piped into my ears made the run much easier. I didn't realize that I was hitting sub-6 minute pace until the sexy female voice read out my pace, my distance and time. I was also prompted at the halfway mark, at which point I u-turned back to my starting point. The music tempo had been gradually increasing and so did my pace. Then the voice began counting down from 800 meters, then 500 meters, and so on down to the final 100. I didn't get to listen to my PowerSong as I probably didn't hold the button long enough.

Sync, sync, sync!



Back at the Nike office, the Nano was synced to the Mac and after logging on to the Nike+ account, my workout was uploaded to the website

(<http://www.nikeplus.com.my/>).

Instantly I was able to review my previous workouts and track my distance run, calories burned, pace and so on. You can also opt to view your records by individual runs, by week or month. In the website, you can set your goals or if I'm in the

mood, I can invite fellow Nike+iPod users into my circle and challenge them to a target.

So do I like the Nike+iPod? You bet! Having been a user of diaries to log my training runs, I like its online logging and tracking capabilities. Of course the audio feedback concept is way cool, as I no longer have to guess my pace and if in the unlikely event that I forgot my watch, I can still be informed of my timing. All that makes the gear a great motivational tool for fitness enthusiasts, be they newbies or seasoned athletes. Now, I wonder if the female audio feedback can call out "Pick up the pace, baby!"

Experience Nike+!

Nike Malaysia will be holding trialing sessions at various Fitness First branches, so be the first to tune into the Nike+ experience. Trialing starts 17 March. For more information on how to register, log on to www.nike.com.my or clicking on the Nike+ banner at www.runnersmalaysia.com.my

Pricing & Availability

The Nike+iPod kit (pictured in a box below) will be available in April 2007 for a suggested retail price of RM139 through Nike Concept stores as well as Apple Store® in Malaysia. The iPod Nano and armband are sold separately.



The Nike+iPod kit requires a Nike+ shoe and a iPod nano with Mac® with a USB 2.0 and Mac OS® X version 10.3.9 or later; or a Windows PC with a USB 2.0 port and Windows 2000, XP Home or Professional (SP2).

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