



Wearing the Apple Watch SE 3 and Ultra 3: Small Changes, Big Impact

Summary

The Apple Watch SE 3, priced at \$249, offers features like an always-on display, gesture controls, and onboard Siri processing, making it a budget-friendly option. The Ultra 3, priced at \$799, boasts a redesigned wide-angle OLED display, improved battery life, and satellite connectivity for emergency situations. Both the SE 3 and Ultra 3 launch with watchOS 26, featuring a new holistic sleep score metric and other enhancements.



CUPERTINO—[Three new Apple Watches](#) are vying for a spot on your wrist. I spent time with the flagship Apple Watch Series 11, the budget-minded SE 3, and the premium rugged Ultra 3 [smartwatches](#) at Apple Park. I already detailed my [first impressions of the Series 11](#), so read on to find out what stood out to me about the SE 3 and the Ultra 3.

Apple's \$249 Watch SE 3 Feels More Expensive Than It Is

The most affordable member of the [Apple Watch lineup](#), the SE 3 closes the gap with the mainline Series models thanks to an always-on display, gesture controls, onboard Siri processing, music playback, wrist temperature sensing, sleep apnea notifications, and ovulation estimates. It uses the S10 chip of the Apple Watch Series 10, and will be functionally quite similar to last year's flagship Apple Watch. As a durability upgrade, it has the same Ion-X glass as the Series 11 for improved scratch resistance compared with the second-gen SE and the Series 10.

During my hands on time with the SE 3, I noticed a step down in screen quality when compared with the Series 11, but that difference would be much less noticeable when not looking at the models side by side. Otherwise, it feels like a mainline Apple Watch.

The SE 3's battery promises 18 hours between charges, and it can juice up quickly when plugged into a wall. With just 15 minutes of charging time, it should be able to regain 8 hours of battery life. The Series 11 should last longer, with Apple estimating 24 hours of use on a charge.



Apple Watch SE 3 (Credit: Andrew Gebhart)



[Apple Watch SE 3 Review](#)

4.0 Excellent

Like the Series 11, the SE 3 launches with [watchOS 26](#), complete with Apple's new holistic sleep score metric to help you gauge the quality of your rest. It'll have access to all the rest of my favorite watchOS 26 features, including [Workout Buddy](#) to coach you through runs. However, the SE 3 won't offer the sobering and potentially lifesaving hypertension detection feature available on the Series 11 and the Ultra 3.

The Series 11 also has access to a wider range of finishes as it is offered in four aluminum colors (jet black, rose gold, silver, and space gray) and three titanium colors (slate, gold, and natural), whereas the Watch SE 3 only comes in aluminum in midnight and starlight. The Watch SE 3 is smaller as well; it's offered in 40mm and 44mm cases, whereas the Watch Series 11 comes in 42mm and 46mm sizes. The SE 3 starts at \$249, well below the \$399 base price of the Series 11. Thanks to the always-on display and upgraded processor, it seems to be an excellent way to jump into the Apple Watch lineup for less money.

Apple's Watch Ultra 3 Looks the Same, But Feels Way More Capable

[Apple Watch Ultra 3 Review](#)

4.0 Excellent

On the other end of the range, the high-end Apple Watch Ultra 3 looks and feels just as sporty (and bulky) as ever. Like its predecessor, it comes in one 49mm size, in natural or black titanium, with a variety of band choices. It still costs \$799, but it has gained a few new tricks to justify that price.



Apple Watch Ultra 3 (Credit: Eric Zeman)

For one thing, it should get even better battery life than the previous generation. Apple expects it to last 42 hours on a charge with normal use, up from 36 hours for the Ultra 2. Since we often find the company's estimates to be conservative, I expect it'll last a full weekend in the real world.

Additionally, the display has been redesigned. It's now a wide-angle OLED display for better off-angle viewability, with 24% thinner borders than its predecessor. The new screen does make an immediate impression. When compared with my current Ultra 2, the screen on the Ultra 3 looks much more refined.



Left to right: Apple Watch Ultra 3, Ultra 2 (Credit: Andrew Gebhart)

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The OLED change matches the update Apple gave to its Series 10 screen last generation, but of course, the Ultra 3 has a bigger display area than even the largest Series models. In always-on mode, it'll refresh more often than the previous Ultra screen, up to once a second from once a minute, and Apple says the Stopwatch, Timer, and more than 20 watch faces will support this new capability for less lag.

Most notably, the Ultra 3 is the only one of the lineup with satellite connectivity. If you're out in the wilderness without access to an ordinary cell signal, you'll be able to communicate via satellites to contact emergency services, update your loved ones with your location, or send a text. I'll

need to get the watch out into the wild to see this satellite connectivity in action, so stay tuned for more.

Pricing and Availability

The Apple Watch SE 3, Ultra 3, and Series 11 are all available for preorder now and will hit stores on Sept. 19. I plan to put them to the test, so make sure to check back soon for my reviews. In the meantime, head over to our feature and spec [comparison of all three new models](#).



About Our Expert

Andrew Gebhart

Senior Writer, Smart Home and Wearables

I'm PCMag's senior writer covering smart home and wearable devices. I've been reporting on tech professionally for nearly a decade and have been obsessing about it for much longer than that. Prior to joining PCMag, I made educational videos for an electronics store called Abt Electronics in Illinois, and before that, I spent eight years covering the smart home market for CNET.

I foster many flavors of nerdism in my personal life. I'm an avid board gamer and video gamer. I love fantasy football, which I view as a combination of role-playing games and sports. Plus, I can talk to you about craft beer for hours and am on a personal quest to have a flight of beer at each microbrewery in my home city of Chicago.