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AN AVIATION SMART WATCH GO AHEAD AND TALK TO YOUR WRIST

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Aviation watches have gone from essential tools, to fashion statements, to nearly complete obsolescence during the past half-century.



Garmin is determined to make watches relevant again, and its D2 Air X10 accomplishes this with features that would have seemed like science fiction to previous generations of aviators.

Voice recognition, a pulse oximeter, GPS navigation, and a national aviation database are all built into a light, attractive, moderately-priced (\$549.99) watch with a battery that lasts up to five days in normal operation or 10 hours when using its internal GPS and other power-hungry features.

The new Air X10 version is the same size as the D2 Air watch (introduced in 2020) but adds voice recognition so the wearer can use voice assistants like Siri or initiate phone calls and text messages at the push of one dedicated button.

Like many pilots, I stopped wearing a watch in recent years and seldom missed it. After all, omnipresent smart phones tell time just fine, and you don't have to reset them when moving between time zones. But becoming a watch wearer again while writing this review was surprisingly enjoyable, and it brought back some once-familiar cockpit habits. Holding short of a runway before takeoff, for example, used to be the moment for starting the timer, and doing so became second nature. That's not necessary on the Air X10 since it switches to aviation mode, including a timer, as soon as it senses a climb. Manually setting a destination, however, provides a constant readout of ground speed, altitude, and ground track. And if you prefer a horizontal situation indicator with a magenta course line, the Air X10 watch face will instantly morph into that, too.

Garmin's strength has long been the tight integration of its growing universe of devices, and the Air X10 is no exception. If you're running the Garmin Pilot app on a smart phone or tablet, for example, those devices will seamlessly share the active flight plans with the watch. (But don't worry. The watch can't alter flight plans on those other devices.)

The D2 Air X10 can be useful across the full spectrum of GA aircraft. When flying a low-and-slow airplane with minimal avionics, it provides a GPS navigation backup, weather reports, and nearest-airport guidance. In highly sophisticated cockpits, it can send and receive texts, check flight plans, and even call ATC. The D2 Air X10 excels before and during flight. It shows METAR weather at a glance, communicates effortlessly with other Garmin avionics, and can serve as a navigator of last resort if everything else goes dark.

It's also comfortable, rugged, and looks great—and those considerations have always been top of mind to pilots.

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AOPA Pilot Editor at Large Dave Hirschman joined AOPA in 2008. He has an airline transport pilot certificate and instrument and multiengine flight instructor certificates. Dave flies vintage, historical, and Experimental airplanes and specializes in tailwheel and aerobatic instruction.

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