

AI and Running Gear

As we continue exploring AI's impact on the running and walking community, we wanted to look at how AI makes recommendations on running gear.

Now, before we start, we know that runners use a wide variety of gear—from shoes and socks to smartwatches, hydration vests, and everything in between. Depending on what type of gear you are purchasing, you may want more specialized advice, and of course, runners and walkers have their favorite brands that they swear by. For this article, we chose to look at two types of gear: running socks and smartwatches. We are not recommending or endorsing any specific brand or product. Our goal is simply to see how AI presents information and handles product comparisons.

In addition, if you choose to purchase new gear, we recommend planning your purchase well in advance of your next race. It is generally not recommended to try new shoes, clothing, or other gear for the first time on race day. Give yourself plenty of time to test your new gear during training and make sure it works well for you before race day.

As with the previous articles, we opened an incognito window and used ChatGPT and Google Gemini. We asked the following bold questions:

I need new running socks for my upcoming race. Provide me with 2-3 recommendations for socks that won't blister.

ChatGPT recommended Balega Blister Resist No-Show, Feetures Elite Max Cushion No-Show Tab, and Smartwool Run Target Cushion Ankle. It then gave a one- to two-sentence breakdown of each brand. However, the breakdown felt more like a description rather than a direct comparison. In the end, ChatGPT said, *"My pick: Go with the Balega Blister Resist if blisters are your #1 concern. For a marathon where you want a more locked-in race fit, I'd choose Feetures."*

Google Gemini suggested Balega Blister Resist Quarter socks, Wrightsock Coolmesh II Tab socks, and Feetures Elite Max Cushion No-Show Tab. Like ChatGPT, it also broke down the differences, but Gemini focused on three specific categories: Material Blend, Cushion Level, and Key Blister Defense, and presented that information in a chart for easy comparison. In the end, Gemini stated, *"For your upcoming race, choose Wrightsock Coolmesh II if you want a double-layer design to completely neutralize friction, or Balega Blister Resist for natural mohair temperature regulation and comfort."*

Of course, many running socks are very similar, and the prices between brands tend not to range more than \$5 apart. This makes it easier to try different brands and styles until you find what works best for you.

But what about something with a larger price tag and more variability? That is why we also used AI to compare smartwatches.

LRRC does have a downloadable PDF on our website, [5 Tips for Buying a Sports Watch](#), which is a good starting point for those looking to purchase a sport-based smartwatch. For this article, we are not walking you through how to purchase a smartwatch, but the reference material in that article could still be beneficial.

We asked AI the following question:

I am training for my first half marathon. Recommend a smart watch.

ChatGPT recommended the Garmin Forerunner 170, COROS Pace 4, and Garmin Forerunner 265. As with the socks, it gave a short description of each watch. In the end, it recommended, “My pick for your situation: the Forerunner 170. For a first half marathon, you don't need a \$500+ watch. I'd put the money toward good shoes, socks, and race-day nutrition instead.” It is worth noting that the price range for these watches was between \$250 and \$350.

Google Gemini recommended the Garmin Forerunner 165, COROS Pace 4, and Garmin 970. Like before, Gemini created a comparison chart and looked at display, GPS, battery life, and key advantage. What was interesting here was the outlier: the Garmin 970. While the Garmin Forerunner 165 is around \$200 and the COROS Pace 4 is around \$250, the Garmin 970 is listed at approximately \$750.

For this reason, we decided to redefine the parameters. Our next prompt was:

I am training for my first half marathon, recommend a smart watch that focuses on heart rate and sleep is under \$300.

When we refined our prompt, ChatGPT recommended the Garmin Forerunner 165, COROS Pace 3, and Fitbit Charge 6, with the Garmin Forerunner 165 as the top recommendation. Google Gemini recommended the Garmin Forerunner 165, COROS Pace 3, and Garmin Forerunner 55. Gemini specifically reviewed Price, Heart Rate Tracking, Sleep Tracking, and Half Marathon Readiness, with the Garmin Forerunner 165 also emerging as the best all-around pick.

We wanted to see how much these recommendations change when we increase the budget, so we asked:

I am training for my first half marathon, recommend a smart watch that focuses on heart rate and sleep is under \$750.

With the higher price point, **ChatGPT** recommended the Garmin Forerunner 265, Apple Watch Series 10, and COROS Pace 3, with the Garmin Forerunner 265 as the top choice. Meanwhile, Gemini recommended the Garmin Forerunner 265, Apple Watch Series 10, and Garmin Forerunner 965.

Even when increasing the price range, we saw a lot of consistency and overlapping among the AI-generated recommendations.

So, what does this mean for you?

AI can be a starting point for research and can help you compare products, prices, and specific features when prompted. However, AI should be just one part of your research.

In addition to using AI to compare products, ask other walkers and runners what they like and what has worked for them. If you decide to purchase something, check the return policy, especially when investing in a higher-priced item like a smartwatch. And remember, it's okay to try different brands and styles until you find what works best for you.

Next month, we will be looking at AI and Nutrition: Meal Planning and Fueling.