

April 10, 2015 11:23 pm

How Apple plans to sell a \$10,000 Watch

Tim Bradshaw in Palo Alto, California



Do people want to be whooped and cheered before they try — and perhaps buy — a \$10,000 watch?

That was my experience as I walked into the [Apple Store](#) in Stanford, the closest branch to its Cupertino headquarters and one of the first few to be showcasing the high-priced Apple Watch Edition on Friday.

It seems a stark contrast to the discreet treatment a customer might get at a traditional luxury watch store. Despite Sir Jonathan Ive's many allusions to watchmaking tradition, trying out an Apple Watch still feels more like buying an iPhone than a Rolex — even though the watches' price tags match.

It is not quite fair to compare the two on the first day Apple began receiving orders and showing its latest product in stores around the world.

Not everyone will be cheered and clapped by two dozen blue-shirted Apple employees as I was when I was pushed through the glass doors to take the first scheduled appointment to try the gold Watch Edition.

I arrive just before the store opens to be greeted by a woman with a fashionable bob, glittery gold nail varnish and ambitious glasses, who aside from her generic Apple Store T-shirt would not have been out of place in one of the trendy boutiques such as Colette, Selfridges or Dover Street Market that are also showing the Watch. But I am soon introduced to a burly guy in his twenties who seemed more typical of the Apple Store staff. Before he was on Watch detail, he tells me, he was an “Expert”, one of the store's top reps.



Once inside, I am led past the whooping staff and rows of Watches beneath glass cases to the back of the store.

Unlike some Apple Store demonstrations, my half-hour trial was not held in a private backroom area but on a bench in the open, close to the Genius Bar.

I am asked which arm I wear my watch on (my left) and the assistant sits to my right. He asks which model I want to try first, assuming that I have already done my research, as many high-end watch purchasers typically do. But unlike a high-end watch store, I am not offered a glass of champagne (it

was only 10am, of course) and instead of wearing white gloves, the staff uses a black cloth to polish the Watch's black touchscreen.

"They're going to bring them out one at a time but they're going to be really quick with it," he says. But this being the first of some 250 appointments in this store alone on Friday, the experience did not quite live up to that promise.



I ask for the 42mm gold Edition with a black leather band. A square "midnight blue" suede case, embossed only with Apple's logo, is brought out and placed on a matching padded cloth, as a security guard watches from an respectful distance.

From this sleek case emerges a gold watch with the rubbery "sport" band. There are embarrassed apologies for bringing the wrong model but in fact the "fluoroelastomer" does not seem too incongruous next to the 18-karat gold timepiece.

He fastens it to my wrist as he radios for the correct model, being careful to keep my arm over the padded cloth. Sir Jonathan, Apple's design chief, may have told a New Yorker interviewer that he overheard a VIP customer say "I'm not going to buy a watch if I can't stand on carpet" but this Apple Store's floor is the same solid concrete as all the others. I really don't want to drop a \$10,000 Watch on to concrete.

I really don't want to drop a \$10,000 Watch on to concrete

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The gold device has a reassuring weight on my wrist but the screen is dead. After some fiddling around a demo reel begins to play — complete with an arresting tap on the wrist from its "Taptic Engine" — but it seems odd not to let someone who might spend \$10,000 on a product play with a functioning version first.

A steel model on the table, attached to a heavy block of perspex, does let me use the "Digital Crown" and see the short "glances" of stock prices and text messages, but I cannot try these features with the version on my wrist.

As we wait for the next model to try, I ask about the strengthened gold in the Watch, which Apple promises is "twice as hard as standard gold". The assistant has to look up the information on his iPhone 6 Plus and reads me the same, limited description provided on Apple's website.

Another Watch arrives, this time with a smart leather strap but in dark blue rather than black. Cue more profuse apologies from passing staffers, who explain that the gold watches are all kept in a hidden safe at the back of the store.

I try the "Midnight Blue" anyway and the assistant suggests

taking a photo of it on my wrist with my iPhone, which I do. Whereas a traditional watch store will lay a high-end timepiece against my wrist but does not want to crease the leather, Apple seems happy to have its demonstration units worn properly.

Twenty minutes into our demo, the black leather “classic” band I asked for originally is finally on my wrist.



“I don’t think you got a picture of this one,” my helper nudges again. By this time a case of 10 other Apple Watches has also been brought out for me to try, so I can compare side by side the \$10,000 gold model with a \$350 Sport version. There is no hard sell.

“I was expecting it to be a bit flimsier because it’s the cheaper one,” my handler says of the “Space Grey” aluminium model, “but it holds its own as an Apple product.”

It’s not a limited quantity but it’s definitely not for the masses

But the sales pitch kicks up a gear as soon as my half-hour session comes to an end.

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“I really like the midnight blue on you,” the assistant says. “Maybe check out the new MacBook while you’re here and place an order? Is that cool?”

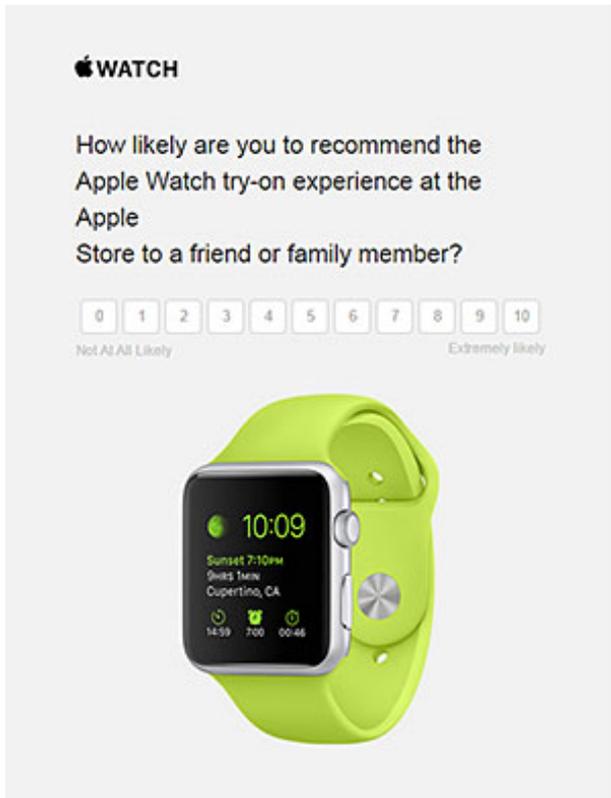
I’m handed over to another employee who thanks me for waiting (I hadn’t been) and asks what I think of the Watch Edition.

“It’s kind of a collector’s piece,” he says. I ask how limited the Edition is, given the online store says that some models have already sold out until August.

“It’s not a limited quantity but it’s definitely not for the masses,” he replies, before directing me to a MacBook. “If you want we can also have you place your order from one of these?”

I say I’m still trying to decide which model and he leaves me to it. “Yeah, take your time! No problem,” he smiles politely.

After a couple of minutes trying out the new MacBook, I quietly walk back out of the glass doors and rejoin the Watch-less masses.



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