

## What To Look For In Elliptical Machines

Purchasing an elliptical trainer is an investment. It's actually a rather large investment, not only financially, but also more importantly, in your health and fitness. You want to make the right buying decision since so much is at stake. I've heard about too many people who purchase the wrong elliptical trainer and then wind up getting permanently sidetracked and discouraged from their carefully planned fitness goals. So please take a few moments to read these key points to find out what to look for in elliptical machines:

- \*Price — if you've read any of my other articles on evaluating elliptical trainers you will know that I'm not a fan of cheap ellipticals. The best advice I can give you is to stay well clear of ellipticals that retail for under \$500. It may seem to go against your grain, but the best value in home ellipticals are between \$1000 and \$2000. You can snag some very high-quality home ellipticals on sale for around \$1300.
- \*Manufacturer Reputation — spend some time to research the major manufacturers of elliptical machines. Some of the top names are: Precor, Life Fitness Smooth Fitness, Tunturi, New Balance, and all of the brands from ICON Health and Fitness such as ProForm, Reebok, NordicTrack, and Weslo. Investigate the quality and repair statistics for their machines and also the responsiveness of their customer service departments. Sometimes bigger isn't always better in this market!
- \*Resistance -- there are two types of resistance: belt friction and magnetic friction. Belt friction is found on low-end models and should be avoided. It's both noisy and unreliable. Magnetic resistance comes in three varieties: manual, motorized and eddy current brake. All use the concept of creating friction on a cast iron flywheel via a magnetic field. Where the motorized version moves a pair of permanent magnets closer or further from the flywheel using an electric motor, the eddy current brake increases and decreases the magnetic field with a series of coils that comprise an electromagnet. The eddy current brake is found on higher-end models and is preferable since there are no moving parts to wear out as in the motorized braking system.
- \*Stride Length — stride length is a critical specification in elliptical trainers. A few inches in this dimension will make the difference between your elliptical trainer feeling like a choppy stepper or a smooth and gliding elliptical trainer. Don't settle for anything under 17 inches. Some models, such as the Smooth CE, have an adjustable stride length to accommodate people of different heights.
- \*Incline Ramp — some models have an adjustable incline ramp that can add a cross training dimension to your elliptical workouts. The steeper the incline the more stress placed on your calf, hamstring, and gluteal muscles. Models such as the commercial grade Precor EFX 546i and the low-end Reebok RL 645 from ICON Health and Fitness both come with incline ramps. Decide for yourself if this is an essential feature.
- \*Console — displays come in 2 basic types: LCD or LED matrix. Some even combine both. The keypad is typically a series of membrane switches to control resistance and select program options. Most elliptical consoles display the essential data such as elapsed time, calories or energy burned, pace, distance, resistance and/or incline level, and heart rate if supported. The console may require separate batteries and/or be powered from the main power connection to the elliptical. The important thing is that the electronics behind the console be reliable. Unfortunately, there are too many stories about faulty electronics in some units that cause the display to malfunction or fail altogether.
- \*Programs — most elliptical trainers come with at least a few built-in programs. Many others come with more than you may ever use. And it's not just the expensive models that have lots of programs. Training programs can add variety and incentive to your workouts and models with a heart rate control feature can dynamically vary the resistance to keep your heart rate in a training zone. Call me boring, but I usually opt for the plain old vanilla "Manual" mode. I'll sometimes add my own variety by changing my pace to perform interval training. This all comes down to personal preferences.
- \*Warranty — like price, the warranty should be a key indicator of the quality of the elliptical trainer. If a manufacturer can only bring them self to offer a 90-day warranty on parts and labor, then don't bother with their products. At a minimum, you should receive a 1-year warranty on parts and labor. Many manufacturers offer very long warranties on the frame, up to 15 years or even lifetime. However, the frame on well-made ellipticals should last a very long time provided the welds are good. It's the drive mechanism and motorized components that take the beating and they are expensive to replace. I usually don't recommend purchasing extended warranties for anything, but I make the exception when it comes to elliptical trainers. These items are a few of the key points to consider when evaluating an elliptical trainer. There are several others that space does not allow me to cover here, but you should also take the time to educate yourself on them as well.

## About the Author

Trainers licensed to deliver courses from the Springboard Consultancy. In addition, there are even more trainers inside organisations.

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