

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW BEFORE PURCHASING A TREADMILL

Treadmills are one of the largest growing areas in sporting goods in the last several years and for that reason many companies and stores are building and selling treadmills to meet this demand.

But are they all good treadmills and how do you tell the difference?

There are two basic components to a treadmill that determine how long and how well a treadmill will run. These are the motor and the motor control board. The motor is simply an electric motor and comes in various physical sizes and is rated by horsepower. The motor control board is both the intelligence and the torque that boosts the power to the electric motor. Without the motor control board an electric motor alone would not provide enough torque to power a treadmill with the user standing on the belt.

Motor rating is the most important aspect to consider when purchasing a treadmill. You should look at the number of family members that will use the treadmill, the speed at which you usually walk or run and the number of times per week that the treadmill will be in use to determine the horsepower that you will need to have a treadmill that runs the same today as it will ten years down the road.

As a general rule we recommend the following CONTINUOUS DUTY HORSEPOWER specifications:

1.75 continuous duty	*for single households *for walkers only
2.0 to 2.25 continuous duty	*for multiple users in family *for walking or light jogging
2.25 to 2.5 continuous duty	*for daily running *for individuals with excessive body weight
2.7 to 3.0 continuous duty	*heavy use such as

fitness centers, hospitals
*running on a daily basis with
many users

HORSEPOWER RATING IS THE MOST ABUSED SPECIFICATION IN THE TREADMILL INDUSTRY.

Buyers need to be very aware of just what the rating on the motor really means. At our store we believe the only rating that you should look at is the CONTINUOUS DUTY horsepower of the treadmill. Continuous duty means that the motor will run at that given horsepower indefinitely without burning up the motor. In other words, if you buy a treadmill with a motor rated at 2.0 horsepower continuous duty it will provide 2.0 horsepower for many years without damage to the motor.

Many stores or mail order sites try to trick the consumer by only listing the PEAK horsepower of the motor. So what is PEAK horsepower? Peak horsepower is the highest generated horsepower that can be produced by the motor but the difference is that PEAK horsepower is only short term as the motor is burning out as it runs at maximum speed.

Several years ago a consumer advocacy agency made it mandatory that the manufacturer list the continuous duty horsepower on the side of the motor located under the cover of the treadmill. However, what the marketing departments of large chain stores and mail order sites did was to hide the continuous duty rating from the consumer and instead provide the peak rating to mislead the consumer.

Let's look at an example from the current 2005 fall ProForm treadmill sold by Sears. The model is the 650E which is a very popular model that Sears sells for \$899. Under power rating it quotes that the motor is a Mach Z 2.80THP motor. So what is THP? THP is a misleading term that means PEAK horsepower and the maximum peak horsepower that this treadmill generates is 2.8 horsepower. The Continuous Duty rating on this treadmill is actually only 1.25 horsepower but no where in the advertising is the continuous duty rating listed. The only way you the consumer would know what the rating is would be to ask the salesman to remove the cover and read the rating off of the motor. Not only is this misleading but the treadmill doesn't even meet the minimum requirements of continuous duty horsepower for an individual walker.

Let's look at another example of the current Schwinn 820P treadmill that has been in the top three of Consumer Reports the last two years and sells for \$1299.00. The Continuous Duty rating which is listed right on the front page of the advertising is 2.0 horsepower. The Peak horsepower, although meaningless, is 5.1 horsepower and the motor is physically twice as large as the motor in the ProForm treadmill. There is no misinformation in the advertising for this treadmill. You, the consumer, know exactly what you are purchasing.

The bottom line is if the salesman or advertisement doesn't tell you the Continuous Duty of the treadmill then they are trying to hide the fact that this treadmill is inferior and isn't built to last but a few years.

All treadmills, even ones that have inadequate horsepower, all run well out of the box at first. As treadmills age the walking belt gets stiffer, the rollers aren't as smooth rolling, dust collects in and around the motor, and each year the motor has to work harder to do the same amount of work. Last year in our repair shop 22 treadmills were dropped off for diagnosis and/or repair. Of these 22 treadmills, 22 were diagnosed with burned-out motors. And in each instance the machine had a rating of less than 1.75 continuous duty horsepower – less than the minimum rating for treadmills that we sell. While we stand behind our products, in the 20-plus years that we have sold treadmills, we have never had to repair or replace a treadmill we sold because of a burned-out motor.

OTHER IMPORTANT ITEMS TO CONSIDER WHEN PURCHASING A TREADMILL

The second most important component to a treadmill is the motor control board which looks similar to a computer board you find in your home computer. It's hard for the consumer to determine what is a quality board as compared to a cheap board unless the cover is removed to examine it. In a nutshell, a motor control board in a quality treadmill is 2 to 3 times larger and thicker than one found in a treadmill that sells for \$899 or less. Vibration is the number one culprit that ruins a motor control board. Vibration comes from every step that you take on your treadmill. Small, thin boards crack under vibration and large, thick boards with large capacitors and chokes don't crack under vibration and this is the quality of motor control boards you find in our treadmills.

Look at the amount of plastic incorporated in the treadmill as compared to the amount of steel. It is easy to pick out a cheap treadmill if you take the time to compare it to quality treadmills at our store. Arm rails should never be made out of plastic.

The rollers that the walking belt rotates around should be a minimum of 2.5 inches in diameter. The smaller the diameter the roller the more friction the belt generates going around the rollers and this equates to the motor having to work harder. Larger rollers have larger bearings and they cost more but in the long run they make the treadmill run smoother and last longer.

The rail thickness is also very important. If the rails that hold the rollers are inadequate they can actually bend over time. Again, comparing treadmills in all price ranges will help you to determine a quality treadmill over one that is poorly made.

Compare warranties on treadmills. Many inexpensive treadmills have 90 days to one year warranty on defective parts. Our treadmills, for example, have 30 years on the motor and frame, two years on parts and electronics, and one year on labor.

Compare installation and service on treadmills. Will they deliver, setup and adjust the belt tension and tracking? Will they show you how to lubricate the belt and adjust the tracking of the belt? Will they make house calls if you should have any problems or do you have to bring the treadmill in for service? Do they provide any repair service outside of the warranty at all?

At our store, we help you find the treadmill that fits your needs, deliver it, set it up and show you how to maintain it for many years of use. We encourage you to compare pricing and brands and recommend that you bring your walking or running shoes and try out different models. I think you will find that our service and pricing is hard to beat by any of our competitors.

Jim Thurman