

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW BEFORE PURCHASING A TREADMILL

Treadmills are one of the most expensive pieces of sporting goods the average home owner will purchase in their lifetime. That is why every fitness store, sporting goods store, mass merchandiser and even home centers now carry a full line of treadmills. With prices ranging from several hundred dollars to as high as three to four thousand, 45 inch to 60 inch belt lengths, heart rate control, programs, Ipod hook-ups, LCD television screens, just which treadmill out there will provide the dependability and the features you want?

Just how do you tell the difference between quality and a good value?

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 a 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. To determine the motor size that will best suite your needs you need to determine how many family members will use the treadmill, the speed at which they usually walk or run and the total number of hours the treadmill will be used per week. Having this information first before you go shopping will help you to purchase a treadmill that will last a minimum of ten years.

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

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| 2.0 to 2.25 continuous duty | *for single households *for walkers only |
| 2.25 to 2.75 continuous duty | *for multiple users in the family *for walking or light jogging |
| 2.75 to 3.5 continuous duty | *for daily running |

*for competitive athletes
*multiple family users

3.0 to 4.0 continuous duty

*most common size
For commercial use

Now that you know the horsepower range you should be looking for it is easy to find the treadmills that will meet your requirements. I only wish it was that easy for the customer to do.

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 rating of the motor. 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 2.25 continuous duty horsepower it will provide 2.25 horsepower for many years without damage to the motor.

Many stores or mail order sites trick the consumer by either listing the PEAK horsepower of the motor or just "HP" which in effect is the PEAK horsepower rating. 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 can only be maintained for a short period of time before the motor starts to burn up. You can find Peak horsepower ratings listed on lower priced treadmills ranging from 2.5 to 4.0 HP. In reality, the continuous duty rating of these motors is in the 1.25 to 2.0 range which doesn't meet what I recommend as minimum motor horsepower requirements.

So how do you know if the manufacturer or the salesman is selling you a treadmill using Peak or Continuous Duty ratings?

The easiest way is to ask the salesman to remove the motor cover so that you can inspect the physical size of the motor and the motor control board. You will find that in many instances the salesman no longer wants to sell you a treadmill after you ask that question. I have personally posed as a customer at Sears, Nordic Trac Kiosks, and Scheels Sporting Goods stores. In every

instance the salesman lost his or her enthusiasm to sell me a treadmill.

Motor covers on our floor models are loose and we personally show you “what’s under the hood.” A good rule of thumb for you to judge if a salesman is quoting you Peak or Continuous Duty is this: a 2.5 Continuous Duty motor will be 4.5 to 5 inches in diameter and 10 to 12 inches long. The entire motor case will be made of metal and it will sit on metal brackets because it is heavy, (15-20 lbs). A motor that states 2.5 PEAK or just 2.5 HP will be 2.5 to 3 inches in diameter and 6-7 inches long. The motor case is usually all metal but some actually use plastic end caps. And just for reference, a commercial rated motor that you would find in a fitness center treadmill will be 5 to 5.5 inches in diameter, 12 to 14 inches long and weight 25-35 lbs.

So now that you know about motors and while the salesman has the motor cover off, let’s take a look at the motor control board. A good motor control board for any treadmill in the 2.25 to 3.5 Continuous Duty horsepower range will be a minimum of 4 by 6 inches and 5 by 8 is even better. Motor control boards that are smaller than 4 by 6 inches are inadequate in maintaining power to the motor and are commonly found on PEAK rated motors.

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 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 bearings in the rollers begin to dry out, dust collects in and around the motor, motor brushes wear down and each year the motor has to work harder to go a set speed. In treadmills that are inadequately powered the most common complaint we hear from the owner is that as they walk on their treadmill it continually slows down during their workout. Of all the treadmills we have sold, the above complaint is one that I have never heard in reference to one of our treadmills.

Finally, here are a few other parts of a treadmill to inspect while you are shopping. Look at the amount of plastic that is incorporated in the treadmill as to the amount of steel. It is easy to pick out the cheap treadmill as it will use a lot of plastic. Arm rails should always be metal and never plastic.

The rollers that support the walking belt 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, (sides of the treadmill that the deck rests on) are very important. Thin rails can actually bend over time and make the treadmill useless. Look at the belt as well. A good belt should be at least a 2 ply belt and should be 1/8 to 1/4 thick. If it looks like a sheet of black sand paper it's a good bet you will find small rollers, a lot of plastic parts and a very small motor and motor control board.

And last, compare warranties on treadmills. Many mass merchant and mail order treadmills only have 90 days warranty on the motor control board and other parts. Just for reference, our treadmills have a lifetime motor and frame warranty, 5 to 10 year parts warranty and one year labor.

Don't forget installation and service on your new treadmill. 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 or try to sell you a service contract for simple maintenance you can do yourself? 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 time period?

At Thurman's bike & Sport 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 the different models. I think you will find that our service and knowledge is hard to beat by any of our competitors.

Jim Thurman