

Product Review: Trackbar Emotion Offers Solution to the “Type and Reach”

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Type, reach, scroll, click, scroll, click, reach, type, reach, scroll, click, repeat. No matter what you’re doing on the computer all day, your hands are repeating a series of motions like these hundreds of times throughout the day. The constant reaching back and forth between the mouse and keyboard not only slows down your work, it also strains your hands and arms, which can cause carpal tunnel and other RSIs.

No matter how ergonomically designed a mouse is, if it still requires reaching, it does not solve the problem. I currently use the Logitech Marble Mouse, which offers me some relief from the pain I feel using a standard mouse, but not much.



So, being in the market for a new mouse, I was excited to try the Trackbar Emotion at the HFES exhibition in San Francisco. The Trackbar Emotion is made by the Swedish company, Euro Office, and has only just recently been available in the US. The basic concept of the Trackbar is based on a principle recommended by European doctors called the Centered Pointing Device Method, which reduces strain on the arms and hands by eliminating the need to reach back and forth between the keyboard and mouse. Instead, the Trackbar is centered right at the base of the keyboard and your palms rest on the smooth, sweat-resistant surface as you type.



The most unique feature of the Trackbar is, well, the trackbar. As I was typing, the smooth gray “log” was within reach with my palms and thumbs, or a short move away to reach with my fingers. The trackbar rolls forward and back and slides from side to side. It seemed weird at first, but it was incredibly comfortable and intuitive. Have you ever tried navigating your mouse ball with your thumbs? It doesn’t really work. The trackbar

however, was surprisingly easy to maneuver with either my fingers, thumbs, or even the palms of my hands.

Another interesting thing I noticed about the Trackbar is that instead of my right hand being bent at the wrist to hold the mouse, both my hands rested symmetrically and comfortably on the sides of the Trackbar whether I was using it or not, just like a hand rest for my keyboard. Speaking of symmetrical, the Trackbar is actually reversible so that the navigation bar can either be closer to your body, or closer to the keyboard. I didn't use it long enough to have a preference, but I was impressed by the feature. Being able to navigate using different parts of my hand and adjusting the set up of the mouse is a great way to mix it up and minimize the effect of doing the same exact motions over and over.

The mouse buttons were also reachable with my thumbs from the keyboard, and a short reach for my fingers. I wasn't sure if I was supposed to use my thumbs or fingers, but Mike Sjöblom, the President of Euro Office said there is no right way to use the Trackbar, my hands will naturally find their own favorite way to use it. The clicking pressure needed to click the mouse buttons was light, apparently up to 3 times less pressure is necessary to click than with other mouse buttons. Although that was not something that I really noticed, it is a good feature for people actually suffering the symptoms of carpal tunnel.

I can see the Trackbar Emotion becoming part of my ergonomic workstation solution some time in the near future. The only problem is its prohibitive sticker price of \$249. Considering I spent \$19.99 for my Marble Mouse, the Trackbar will definitely be a step up for me. Something Mike Sjöblom said will stick with me as I make the tough decisions of what products to include in my ergonomic repertoire, "ergonomic products should be used for prevention, not rehabilitation."

On that note, I have to stop typing...my wrists hurt.