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Ergonomic Trackbar Emotion Review

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A couple of years ago we reviewed the RollerMousePro, a docking station for your keyboard that included a "rollerbar" and set of buttons below the typing area. The rollerbar moves the cursor, requiring little or no wrist movement, while your hands stay in place near the typing area without the need to stretch for a mouse.

The Trackbar Emotion is a similar ergonomic input device. It's not intended to help you blast enemies faster or surf around in 3D. The idea, like most ergonomic devices, is to alleviate or prevent symptoms related to Repetitive Stress Injury (RSI) and Carpel Tunnel Syndrome by offering a "healthier" alternative to a regular mouse. The health benefits of an ergonomic input device are open to debate, but anything that reduces the movement of certain muscles already in pain while getting the same job done will likely gain a dedicated audience, not only because they prefer it, but because they require it.

So, as an ergonomic input device, is the Trackbar Emotion something you should consider? Its intention is to replace the mouse completely, so it must replicate all the functions of a mouse.

The Trackbar Emotion is intended to sit just below the middle of the main typing area of your keyboard, keeping your fingers near the keys at all times. You no longer have to stretch for a mouse, which helps reduce shoulder strain. The device includes the trackbar (we'll use the lowercase "trackbar" spelling to refer to the bar that moves the cursor), four buttons, and a clickable scroll wheel. The two buttons below the left- and right-click buttons are the Next and Previous buttons, commonly used when surfing the web. The Trackbar Emotion's exterior is composed mostly of plastic, including the wrist rests.

The unit is pretty compact in size, and can easily be trucked around in its stylish carrying case. Since it is plug-and-play, users can easily take it from computer to computer without any hassle of installing software. The unit is compatible with Windows and Mac OSes.

Using the Trackbar Emotion

The Trackbar Emotion requires no software or driver installation, so it starts right up when you connect it to your computer. You can use either its USB or PS2 plug; both come with the unit. If you plug it in via USB, there's an additional USB hub that lets you attach another input device, which we tested with success. The cord with the unit is detachable, and quite frankly a bit short for our tastes at 4.5 feet. Our computer case is to our right, and the cord protrudes from the left side of the Trackbar Emotion. We prefer longer cords to route the cord from behind the desk so that it is out of the way. The Emotion's cord was a little too short to reach around this way.



Since the Trackbar Emotion doesn't dock with your computer, there will be some separation between it and your typing area. This will depend mostly on the shape and design of your keyboard. Curvy keyboards without a straight-edge need not apply here. You want a keyboard with the least possible space between the spacebar and the edge of the keyboard. The idea is to keep your hands as close to the keyboard and Trackbar Emotion as possible in order to reduce back-and-forth movement, which also helps increase productivity.

The most common way to use the Trackbar Emotion is with your wrists on its wrist rest while your fingers move the trackbar up and down and side to side. The buttons below the trackbar are in good position for your thumbs to press, while the scroll wheel sits between the main right- and left-click buttons. Some will also be pleased to discover that their hands stay flat while using the trackbar, whereas some bulky mice require users to bend the wrist up to operate.

An alternative is to keep your fingers in the normal typing position and move the trackbar with your thumbs. This requires a bit of a stretch, especially when you want to hit the buttons. This method is much tougher, but in no means impossible.

A good thing about the trackbar is that you can have your non-dominant hand pick up some slack and move the cursor from time to time. This is especially important for those who have RSI in one hand. It's much easier to maneuver the trackbar with your non-dominant hand than it is with a mouse, so this is a big plus.

Since we've had experience using a similar input device, the RollerMousePro, using a trackbar seemed like second nature to us. Its fluid movement is identical to that of the RollerMousePro, so new users (based on our previous experiences) will experience a slight learning curve at first, but will be quick to overcome it within a week. Moving the trackbar from side to side, up and down, was intuitive and effortless. The 800 DPI resolution was suitable for performing general Windows tasks, but don't expect high-action gaming to get the same results.

Using the trackbar with your fingers will bring back memories of using a trackball. One key difference, however, is that a trackball can be spun in any direction infinitely, without a wall or border to stop it from spinning. This is not the case with the trackbar. While the trackbar can be spun vertically without end, it does meet a wall or "dead end" when rolled all the way to the left or right. When this would happen, a switch mechanism would activate to send the cursor to the edge of the screen. This enables the cursor to meet its destination even without room for the trackbar to move.

Trackbar Emotion vs. the RollerMousePro

The makers of the Trackbar Emotion introduced the first electronic rollbar mouse a few years before the RollerMousePro, which was designed to replace the traditional mouse. Our experiences with the RollerMousePro were positive when we reviewed it two years ago, and we eventually used it on-and-off for well over a year. So within a week of reviewing the Trackbar Emotion, we were re-introduced to this technology, but not without noting the similarities and differences between the two.

One difference is the size and feel of the two bars. The RollerMouse's rollerbar is long, yet slimmer, than the trackbar. The rollerbar is rubberized for traction, while the trackbar is more smooth and plastic. These are cosmetic differences and aren't really handicaps on either side. Some people may prefer the bulkier trackbar over a slimmer rollerbar because of more surface area for traction.



Another thing we would like to have seen is a mouse click for the trackbar. We would, by our own habits, press on the trackbar in hopes of it clicking, but it wouldn't. The benefit of having a clickable trackbar is that you don't have to keep your hands completely on the trackbar during use. You can click with your thumbs, while keeping your fingers on the keys. Also, we felt that a clickable wheel would allow for more casual surfing and computer use, as we had used the feature for about 90 percent of our mouse clicking on the RollerMousePro.

On the other hand, it's worth noting that with a non-clicking trackbar, we didn't run into the issue of accidental clicks when moving the cursor. It is possible to minimize this by using a tension sensitivity switch below the RollerMousePro, but the problem would still crop up from time to time.

The Trackbar Emotion is much smaller in size than the RollerMousePro, meaning it's easy to lug it around if you don't want to use a mouse on somebody else's computer. The handy traveling case the unit comes with makes this very easy. The RollerMousePro docked with your computer and was too big to casually carry around.

Final Thoughts

The Trackbar Emotion offers an alternative and ergonomic solution over the traditional mouse. Whether or not that means it is suited for *you* is another issue. Anybody, and especially those with RSI or related injuries, should note its potential benefits. Most movement will be done with the fingers, much more so than with a regular mouse, but this time with very little wrist movement required. Since the unit is symmetrical and easy to use with one or both hands, users with trouble areas on one hand can simply switch over to the other hand. The Trackbar Emotion is positioned below the main typing area, leaving your hands closer to the keyboard while mitigating any potential shoulder strain that can be caused by reaching for a mouse.

There's a slight learning curve, but one that will not be an issue after a solid week of using it. Moving the cursor is somewhat similar to the way a trackball works. We would have liked it if the trackbar were clickable, but that can be a demand for some users and not others.

Side by side, we feel that the RollerMousePro is a superior product, but the race is close. Some may find reasons to prefer the Trackbar, pointing out its small, travel-friendly size and that it includes a USB hub for another input device. Both units can be had for a premium price of \$200. That's some hefty change, but most ergonomic devices are more expensive than mainstream, non-ergonomic ones.

Product: Trackbar Emotion

Company: [Euro Office](#)

Price: \$199

Pros: Easy to get used to; doesn't require stretch for a mouse; compact for the traveler on the go.

Cons: Expensive; no clickable trackbar.

Summary: Other than the price and a few quirks, the Trackbar Emotion is an ergonomic input device that does the trick.

Rating:

