



Product Review – SpeedCoach Mobile for iPhone

January 11, 2010



Product: SpeedCoach Mobile
Manufacturer: Performance Phones
Cost: \$64.99 (charges apply for uploads)

Manufacturer Website:
<http://www.performancephones.com>

Purchase & Customer Reviews:



In summary:

Pros: wireless (no calibration required); portable; accurate readings; bright, easy to read display

Cons: pace per stroke (m/s) reading is delayed; pace per stroke (m/s) does not consider water current

Overall Rating: *Good to Very Good*

We chose the SpeedCoach Mobile for iPhone by Performance Phones as our first review for a number of reasons, all of which are in line with the Consortium's mission of bringing applied science and technology to rowing and coaching. Questions we asked: Is it new or does it present a new way of using existing technology? Does it possess the potential to improve the way we coach or train? Does it provide new insight into the way we row? Does it have a good usefulness to ease-of-use ratio? Is it accessible to the average coach or athlete? To all of these questions, the answer was largely, yes. The SpeedCoach Mobile takes a common tool (NK's traditional "wired" SpeedCoach), tosses out the wires, adds geo mapping capability, single-click workout uploading with interactive graphs and charts, bounce and check monitoring and more and does it all at a bargain price. But above all of the qualifications that landed it on our radar, and in addition to Performance Phones' enthusiasm, responsiveness, ingenuity, and genuine interest in providing responsive service, Performance Phones seems committed to listening to the rowing community and continuing to improve their product and service to best fit the needs of rowers and coaches.



Figure 1 – Illuminated display

Setting up the device to go out on the water couldn't be easier. A required buoyant waterproof case (\$40.00 from NK) doubles as protection from the elements and a mounting device via a large Velcro strap. Having no wires allows you to step into any boat, from any boat, and get feedback immediately with no set-up hassle or issues with wiring. That means teams utilizing multiple boats no longer have to worry about purchasing or maintaining wiring (except, of course, for coxswain PAs as the SpeedCoach Mobile does not support a voice amplification system). Another blessing of the iPhone version: say good-bye to the need to calibrate. The application functions solely off the iPhone's internal systems, namely GPS and an accelerometer. GPS alone provides speed and distance as well as mapping information (yes, when you upload your workout you can view your course on Google or Bing Maps. Hmm... training coxswains?), while the accelerometer provides motion start and stop, stroke rating/count, as well as two unique features not found on the wired version, check and bounce. My favorite feature, though, I found on my first test run. The dark morning illuminated a most obvious pro: at my feet sat a glowing, clear, large-font screen waiting for me to give it an excuse to throw data my way. Wonderful!

Function-wise, the SpeedCoach Mobile does everything you would expect from a SpeedCoach: pace (/500m splits), stroke rate and count, elapsed time, distance, average pace, and interval number. Programming workouts is easy. Your options are similar to what you are able to program on the newer ergometer computers (by interval, time, stroke count, or a combo of all, each with rest time) allowing considerable flexibility with types of workouts you can track. But the SpeedCoach Mobile is able to do more. By utilizing the accelerometer you also get a reading for bounce and check that I found to be on the better half of somewhat useful (choppy water impacts bounce). Once you have completed your workout, log into your Facebook account (login straight from the SpeedCoach Mobile application) hit upload on your phone, and you're workouts are instantly uploaded to a Facebook application that you can access via your Facebook account. Navigating and upload time: < 15 seconds. Later, from Facebook

on your computer, you can view and even interact (zooming in and out in graph view) with your workouts and intervals in a number of cool ways giving you easy viewing for comparison purposes over workouts, intervals, or even stroke by stroke.

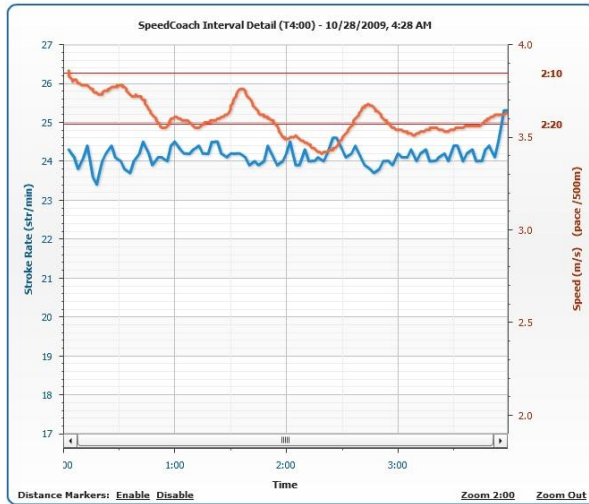


Figure 2 – Example of one view of charting functionality

SpeedCoach. Compare that with using the iPhone version only a handful of times, and you're bound to get some differences in user comfort which I'm trying to consider fairly in this review. An obvious disadvantage is immediacy of data when measuring pace. I'm used to taking a stroke and seeing my pace (meters per second) for that very stroke reflected immediately after release, rather than seeing data captured for a stroke three or four strokes ago as on the iPhone version. Due to the fact that the iPhone registers pace via GPS, it is limited to the same finite limitations that all GPS devices are limited to. To compensate for this and give you a quicker response, you can manually change the settings of the application to increase or decrease the "averaging" window, but you also increase your exposure to volatile GPS anomalies. The other disadvantage is that pace cannot account for water current. With an impeller, rowing downstream will give you the same pace per stroke as rowing upstream. Not so with the iPhone application. Pace is captured relative to land, not water.

All in all, while it will take some time to increase my comfort level with the new device (the bright display helps that), I am fully willing to give Performance Phones' SpeedCoach Mobile a chance. At \$64.99, this is a steal relative to the cost of buying a new wired SpeedCoach (US\$249.00). And, given the pain of installing and maintaining wiring alone, and the fact that I can use this in un-wired borrowed boats (my *modus operandi* since selling my single) this rower's buy rating is boosted considerably higher. That is, of course, if I had an iPhone.

About the Author – W.T. Arnold is a telecommunications and start-up entrepreneur consultant working in Seattle, WA. He was a former full-time athlete training with the elite team at the Pocock Rowing Center under Emil Kossev, a mentor who taught him the value of evidenced-based coaching that includes good, managed use of technology and how it is incorporated into periodization and competition

Performance Phones does charge a fairly nominal per upload fee with some flexibility for fairness (anything beyond 12 uploads in a month, and your remaining uploads are free for the remainder of the month for avid users). Purchasing upload credits is easily done within a few clicks right from the SpeedCoach application on your iPhone.

I'll temper this thus-so-far dreamy review with a few quirks and outright cons of the application—this is aside from buying upload credits (I mean, wouldn't it be great if everything in the world were

free?). Having trained as a full-time athlete for years, I got pretty used to the traditional

preparation. A sculling coach of youth, adults, and elite rowers for over twelve years, he has started his own and consulted on numerous other start-up rowing and rowing related programs.