

## The Suunto t6 Wristop Computer

### High-tech training made easy

After many years of coaching, I still am amazed at the number of athletes who train without knowing anything about their heart rate (HR), resting or while being active. While not a perfect measure of one's training intensity, the heart rate is a truly revealing number. Once understood, one's heart rate can be used to not only guide you toward creating more focused workouts, but also inform you when you've perhaps done too much (a fate all too common for the A-type personality of your average triathlete).

Ask my wife and she will tell you I have the slightly annoying habit of checking my own heart rate many times a day. The first measure is when I first wake up (and I can tell you those numbers going back nearly 20 years). The second measure is while I am training, irregardless of the workout's intensity. This is where heart rate measurement becomes even more important as a tool. Now a devoted spinning student, even my wife can tell me her five heart rate training zones – but the trick is what to do with this information once you have it. Meet the **Suunto t6** ([www.suunto.com/t6](http://www.suunto.com/t6)), a 'wristop' training manager in every sense of the word.



On a recent trip to New York's Tourneau Time machine (ironically to replace my third Nike sports watch in as many years), I discovered a corner of the store dedicated to a line of multi-function specialty watches I had never heard of (that from a self-proclaimed watch-geek). **Suunto** (pronounced Soon-toe as far as I know) offers one of the most comprehensive selection of watches for almost every sporting need. From diving watches to sailing watches, and even watches for golfers (the Suunto G6 enables the golfer to check tempo, rhythm, backswing length and club head speed).

For us endurance athletes, there is the **Suunto t6**, the next generation of heart rate monitors (HRM). In simple terms, a heart rate monitor's usefulness is measured by how easy it is to navigate the various functions. What good is it, if you can't remember how to set the training zones or even access the data collected on your last training run?

For a guy who can't even remember how to empty the memory of his Polar 720 HRM, I found using the **Suunto t6** a breeze after a quick scan of the owner's manual. The **Suunto t6** has three basic screen settings – Time / Altimeter / Training. It is from these three basic starting points, that things get very interesting indeed. Here is a list of some of the functions offered by the **Suunto t6** (and I am most likely leaving a few out):

**Wrist Unit:** Display of heart rate, stopwatch, and time/lap functions, adjustable heart rate zone with alarm function, interval timer that includes warm-up function, plus display of average heart rate during exercise.

**Time:** 12/24 hour clock, calendar, up to three daily alarms, dual time display, countdown timer, and chronograph.

**Memory Functions:** Average heart rate, time within HR zone, plus over/under HR zone limits, split/lap times that include average heart rate (real time), altitude data, and training history (128kb of memory).

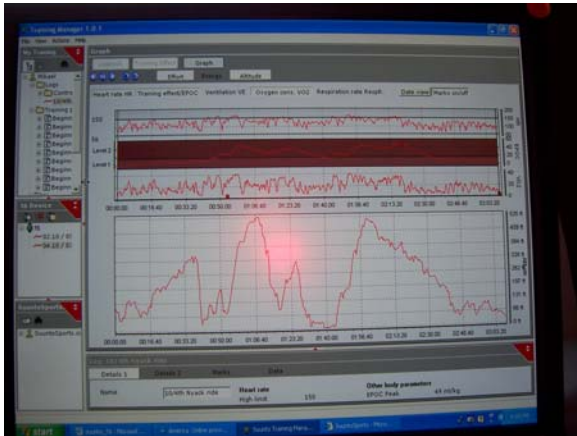
**Altimeter:** Current altitude, vertical speed, cumulative ascent/descent, and altimeter/chronometer mode.

**Barometer/Temperature:** Temperature, pressure trend for the last six hours, absolute barometric pressure at the current location, barometric pressure at sea level.

The **Suunto t6** unit can even be paired with a wireless speed sensor (for the bike) as well as a foot pod to calculate running distance and pace. But that is not what makes the **Suunto t6** unique. What separates the **Suunto t6** from the rest of the pack is the training manager that comes with it. Plug your **Suunto t6** into your computer and now you have a desk top coach to help you analyze the data from not only your individual workout, but from your history of workouts. Once you load your personal data (age, height, weight, resting HR, max HR, level of activity, etc), the training manager takes over from there.

As Suunto states, the **Suunto t6** takes the 'guess work out of training'. This unique training software offers;

- Quick and easy training assessment, training calendar for simple planning, training logbook with follow-up reports, log file exchange via e-mail and internet, altitude profile of workout.
- Deeper analysis of training sessions with 7 body parameters: EPOC (Excess Post-Exercise Oxygen Consumption), heart rate, respiration rate, ventilation volume, oxygen intake, energy consumption, training effect.



The graphing capabilities allow you to plot an almost endless list of measures, such as your HR, VO<sub>2</sub>, and breathing frequency verses the altitude change of a specific training session. The **Suunto t6** also charts another very unique measure called *Excess Post-Exercise Consumption* (EPOC for short). EPOC is a measure of the cumulative oxygen consumption that exceeds the resting oxygen consumption level after exercise. In simple terms, EPOC is the physiological training load to your body caused by the exercise, which can be a very useful piece of information for us endurance athletes. This EPOC value is then used to measure the 'Training Effect' or the value of a specific workout (or even series of workouts) in improving your overall fitness level.

There are five training effect categories: 1. Minor/recovering effect, 2. Maintaining effect, 3. Improving effect, 4. Highly improving effect, 5. Overreaching

The *Calendar View* will monitor your body of training and see first hand if you are working sufficiently hard to make improvements in overall fitness, yet still giving the body ample time to recover by watching the progression of the EPOC values (are you avoiding overreaching?). The **Suunto t6** comes with a *Training Guidebook*, which goes well beyond just teaching one how to use the computer training manager, as it provides a great lesson in sound training philosophies and goes to great lengths to describe the various performance measures in simple enough terms (such as heart rate reserve, respiratory and ventilation rates, oxygen consumption, etc).

At an MSRP of \$499 (closer to \$449 at many retailers I looked up), the **Suunto t6** is a tad more expensive than some of the comparable units from Polar (625, 720, 725, 810) or Nike (Triax Elite). However, having used nearly all of those 'other' units, the **Suunto** is certainly more stylish in appearance than the Polar series (I used to always keep my Polar off my wrist and on the bike), and in my opinion far easier to navigate for not only the watch functions, but also those found in the 'Training Manager'. No wonder it was voted **Best Fitness Gear of 2004** by Men's Health magazine.

Unfortunately, I recently pick up my **Suunto t6** as I am about begin my off-season hibernation, but I have been able to put the unit to good use on a several few long rides and trail runs, as well as a couple local 5K races (had to see that EPOC scale). Truly impressed after my test runs, I am now very eager to put the **Suunto t6** and the *Calendar View* to use next spring. Anyone need a slightly used, but still effective Polar heart rate monitor?



Mikael a Level 1 certified USA Triathlon coach, a Level 3 certified USA Cycling coach, a certified Schwinn indoor cycling instructor and will soon be completing his USA Track and Field certification. The ultimate multi-sport junkie, Mikael competes in numerous cross-country ski races, bike races, running events, and duathlons/triathlons during the calendar year, with a focus on the sprint and Olympic distance triathlons (Ironman racing is a tad too long for my knees!). In 2004, Mikael founded Enhance Sports, a mutli-sport coaching and racing company based in New York City. Visit them on the web at [www.Enhancesports.com](http://www.Enhancesports.com) or by e-mail at [enhancesports@aol.com](mailto:enhancesports@aol.com).