

Marware Sportsuit Convertible for iPod touch

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Company: Marware

Website: www.Marware.com

Model: Sportsuit Convertible

Price: \$35

Compatible: iPod touch

Developing an iPod armband is fairly straightforward: cover as much of the iPod as is possible with a case, provide a neoprene or elastic band to hold it on your arm, and price it reasonably. Marware has been doing this for years with various, iteratively improving editions of its Sportsuit Convertible cases, each well-designed and popular with iPod users. Now the company has released separate Sportsuit Convertibles for the iPhone and iPod touch (\$35 each), built upon the same general components, but with interesting differences in their approaches to iPod touch and iPhone case design.



Both products are made from black or blue Orca skin neoprene—a smoother, nicer-looking version of the materials used in generic neoprene cases—and come packaged with the same four basic components: a case, a detachable Multidapt belt clip, a new and improved armband, and a matching removable key pouch. The clip, armband, and key pouch are identical from iPhone to iPod touch, and as is typical of Marware's workmanship, both attractive and well made. Though the key pouch looks a little like a last-minute addition to the package to rival a similar new feature in Belkin's Sport Armbands, it's more generously sized than Belkin's, and you can leave it off of Sportsuit Convertible should you decide you don't need it.



The big challenge facing all iPod and iPhone armband manufacturers, but particularly Marware, is striking the right balance of protection and accessibility: as the name and prior pack-in details suggest, the case included with each Sportsuit Convertible isn't limited to use as a workout armband; rather, it can be tossed into a pocket or attached to the belt clip and carried around for daily use. This versatility forces an iPhone case maker into a quandry: you can't cover iPhone's camera, bottom, earphone port or proximity sensor, all of which might acceptably be obstructed in a full-time armband—who's going to be snapping pictures, for instance, with an arm-mounted iPhone?



So rather than following Griffin's lead with the somewhat odd Streamline for iPhone and iPod touch, Marware designed two similar but different cases for the two devices, each one appropriate to its features. Like the company's earlier cases for iPods, Sportsuit Convertible for iPod touch is entirely neoprene on the outside except for the clear full screen cover, which works perfectly with the touchscreen controls and offers very good clarity for video viewing. There's only one hole, and that's a small one for the headphone port, on the bottom. Your iPod touch is as safe inside as can be.

The iPhone case is subtly larger than the iPod touch version, and has more holes: one for the camera, three for the ear speaker, one for the proximity sensor, and one for the headphone port. Interestingly, the base neoprene case now has a mesh bottom for uninhibited use of the iPhone's bottom speaker and microphone, offering less protection than the neoprene, but more than a completely open area. As with the iPod touch case, the bottom folds open to let you insert or remove the device, or just access its Dock Connector port. We continue to really like this part of the Sportsuit Convertible designs.



Marware's new armband is also quite nice. A neoprene pad has been added to the inside of the armband to prevent your skin from coming into contact with the hard plastic mounting surface that attaches to the Sportsuit case; this improves its comfort. And like the case and key holder, rather than just looking like flat, unadorned neoprene, the armband now features slanted, dashed lines that add some visual flare. Unlike the other pieces, which have the dashes inked on, they're embossed on the armband's surfaces, a nice touch.

Our only issue with both of these armbands is a carryover from earlier Sportsuit Convertible editions: with each passing year, Convertible seems to lose a major pack-in altogether, or have something replaced with something less interesting, while preserving the same price. Both of these cases lose the semi-hard detachable front shells that were included with iPod classics, which is no real loss for the fully protected iPod touch, but eliminates the one way that some iPhone users could have sweatproofed the perforated screen protector found in that version of Sportsuit Convertible. The gain is the simple key holder.





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If you need a simple armband for either the iPhone or the iPod touch, you can do quite well for much less by picking Belkin's standard Sport Armbands for either device. But as multifunction iPhone or iPod touch case-slash-armband-slash-belt-clip accessories go, Sportsuit Convertible is a superior option to Incase's Sports Multifunction, and a better-equipped but also pricier alternative to DLO's excellent Action Jacket. If you can find a Sportsuit Convertible at a discount, consider it a top pick.