

nbalthaser

□ Posted: December 21, 2005, 1:07 am Post subject: cleanmate first impressions

hello - first off let me say that i am an avid roomba supporter. i've purchased a couple for myself and friends and have gotten other friends and family to purchase them as well. i am a convert. i decided to purchase the cleanmate because: a) i wanted to see what the competition is and, b) i moved into a larger house from a condo and the roomba hasn't been able to keep up so i needed a second solution.

cleanmate 365: the box and packaging were nice - better than i expected. there is a real manual which i think is important. i know the roomba is supposed to be an "appliance" but there's more to it than just "hit the clean button". the cleanmate's manual describes all the functionality, care and cleaning instructions handy tips for new users on how to make a room "cleanmate friendly". irobot should take a clue from their manual.

first observations: the unit appears to be well made with similar materials to the roomba. this is the first thing that impresses me. i really like the remote. very small and it snaps into the top of the unit when not in use. i dislike the huge remote on the roomba and invariably i leave it somewhere and can't find it rendering its existence less than useful. the dust bin on the cleanmate is located at the top of the unit. when the remote control is removed, you can see into the clean plastic dust bin to tell how full it is. you can also see the filter. i like this very much as i don't have to shut the unit off and remove the dust bin like the roomba. there is a slot in the cleanmate to allow for fragrances or a deodorizer. i tried it with a cotton pad and some cologne and it worked great. just enough air is pushed through the deodorizer to freshen up the room. this version of cleanmate (qq1) doesn't have a self charging docking station (next version will) but i haven't found that to be a problem. i drag the roomba from upstairs to downstairs now and so i don't get much value any more from the self docking feature. i got more value out of it when i lived in a single story condo. now, it could actually be considered a nuisance since i don't like having to wait for the thing to crawl out from under the bed when i need to use it. anyways, the cleanmate does something interesting that roomba should definitely incorporate into their future models: it has a photo-optic sensor that guides it from a dark area (like under the bed) to a light area when its battery is about to go. it did this the first time i used it: it was cleaning under a desk and right before it stopped, it clearly reversed itself and found its way out from under the desk into the open. it was neat watching it move from the shadow of the desk and chair into the middle of the room. great feature as i hate to have to find my roomba when it runs out of juice and the charging station is on another floor.

cleaning mechanics: okay, it is clear by looking at the bottom of the cleanmate that it is not as robust as the roomba. it is missing a counter-rotating beater bar, the brush is both softer and smaller in diameter than the roomba. finally, the slot for the vacuum intake is about 2/3 the length of the roomba. it appears that the roomba is designed with a more complete cleaning system. however, i have an engineering background and i'll say this: just because something has more doesn't mean that it cleans any better. so i ran a couple basic tests and here are my results and thoughts:

test #1: roomba and cleanmate each clean a bedroom. then, they each clean the other's bedroom. by emptying out the bins on the second pass, i can tell roughly how well each unit cleaned (e.g. did roomba pick up significantly more remaining dirt from cleanmate's room and vice-versa). both rooms have hard wood floors and are exactly the same size and were cleaned the day before. the results: both cleaned for about 40 minutes. i will say that the cleanmate is slower or more deliberate and the roomba is more aggressive. the cleanmate is definitely easier on the ears and the furniture. i have roomba marks on some of the wood legs of my furniture and this won't be the case with cleanmate because it doesn't hit furniture with the same force. in the final analysis, i was really surprised. both units had about the same amount of debris on the second pass (dust, dog hairs, etc.). this means that each one cleaned at about the same level. [the winner in my mind is the cleanmate](#). i have to say it. the fact that they both cleaned the same, i would take the more deliberate cleaning approach and save my furniture and my ears. truly, the cleanmate is quieter than the roomba. you don't notice it until you hear each on cleaning at the same time in different rooms. you can shut the vacuum part of the cleanmate off and just let it run its navigation program. if you do this, it is almost silent.

test #2: medium pile carpet. no contest here. the roomba won hands down. the cleanmate did so poorly on my carpet i couldn't believe it. it hardly picked up any dog hairs. i was watching very closely and could see that it would pass over an area and leave most of the dog hairs behind. i surmise this is because of the brush. the bristles are both too soft and too short to grab debris off the carpet. this is where the roomba shines. the roomba's stiffer and longer bristles along with the counter-rotating beater bar really make a difference. i will make a point however: i think the roomba brush is too stiff for my hardwood floors and over time is dulling them. [the cleanmate's brushes are excellent for hardwood floors and have demonstrated that they pick up everything that roomba's brushes pick up](#). i would recommend to irobot that they sell different brushes for different floor types.

conclusion: [i am very impressed with the cleanmate](#). my house is three stories and only the bonus room has carpeting. the rest of the house has hard wood floors. i will keep the cleanmate to vacuum most of the house and just use the roomba for the carpeting in the bonus room. i should note however that even though roomba is better at carpets, i have had to exchange my roomba 3 times because it gets worn out so quickly doing carpets all the time. i believe the gears for the wheels and brushes are not robust enough to handle the added friction of the carpet. the brush gears on my last roomba (which was less than a year old) were completely stripped and free spinning and i take pretty good care of my roomba! it remains to be seen how well built the cleanmate is. i'll keep this group posted of my findings.

kudos to metapo for creating a great product at a great price point. i look forward to seeing what else they come up with.

cheers,
neil