

<http://www.pocket-lint.com/review/3619/air-drives-over-ear-headphones>

## AirDrives headphones

Will these free your ears?

by Chris Hall published on 12 November 2008

We've been playing with AirDrives for some time, wondering exactly where to place them. Although they look like earphones, they most distinctly aren't. So let's clear this up first: if you're looking to replace your headphones, then look elsewhere. But do the AirDrives have something else lurking up their sleeves?

Starting with form, as we said above, you'd be forgiven for thinking that the AirDrives are earphones. They take that common form factor of looping over the top of your ear with a flexible arm, which allows you to adjust the tightness to get a secure fit. As these headphones are pitched at sports people amongst others, this is an important point. In our tests we found they were plenty secure, surviving cable bounce whilst running and those difficult head twisting moments whilst cycling.

Now we would normally advise against wearing headphones whilst cycling for the simple fact that denying one of your senses whilst sharing a fairly narrow space with metal boxes travelling at 60mph can only have one sticky conclusion. AirDrives suggest that their unique design sidesteps this problem. So what's the difference?

Well they don't actually fit in your ear. The a small pad at the front of the drivers rest on the tragus, that protrusion at the front of your ear, meaning the drivers themselves lie over the ear canal without entering it. Basically, it's a small pair of speakers held near the opening of your ear. The result is that you hear the music you are playing, but can also hear other environmental noise, so you can be listening to music and still hear the phone ring, your wife offering a cup of tea (or not), or that Ford Escort racing up behind you.

So is there a compromise for this arrangement? Of course there is. Think about dangling your regular headphones beside your ear and the



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result is pretty much the same here. You can hear the music, but so can the person sitting next to you. In our test, you could hear it across the other side of the room. Imagine that annoying person on the train, headphones in, volume too high so everyone could hear it. The AirDrives website suggest "you'll never miss out on a social opportunity whilst rockin' out", which we don't quite agree with: wear these on the train and you'll be lynched.

Whilst the music is there, and any stereo aspects work perfectly well, you don't get the sort of sound quality to make this your everyday set of headphones. You can dismiss any real bass and any subtle elements get lost as they mix with other sounds and leak out in all directions. It is almost like having someone playing background music at all times, accepting of course that you'll hear any other music you encounter.

So let's return to the sporting aspect. At the gym these won't really work because you'll hear all the background music too, but out pounding the pavements the AirDrives really come into their own. Running can be a solitary experience and if you are prone to boredom whilst marathon training, then this will provide you with music, whilst leaving you aware of your surroundings.

For cycling we are not so convinced, unless of course you cycle in areas which are fairly free from traffic. Whilst you can hear your surroundings, we don't think it is worth even the slightest distraction that might make you miss something happening, especially when cycling in busy traffic where the more warning you have the better. That said, these are much more preferable to in-ear headphones in this type of environment. If you are cycling in the woods or offroad things are slightly different where the immediate risks are likely to be the track, so a little music might not be a bad thing.

On the cord of the headphones you'll find a volume slider, which means you can set the

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## At a glance

### What is it?

Headphones with a difference

### Good

You can still hear what is going on around you, comfortable

### Bad

Music quality, not a replacement for standard headphones, potentially limited appeal, can be anti-social

### Verdict

We would not recommended AirDrives a replacement for regular in-ear headphones, but as an additional purchase for those who want to use them whilst out running they have some appeal

**Price** £49.99

**Our score**

**7/10**

**Your score**

**?/10**

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music level appropriate to your immediate surroundings without messing around with your MP3 player. You also have that advantage of not getting sweaty ear holes and in our tests, sweat didn't seem to be a problem.

## **VERDICT**

Having played with the AirDrives for some time, it becomes obvious where their strength lies. Worn in public you can't avoid people hearing whatever you are listening to, especially in a packed commuter train. However, just walking along a busy street, you'll notice how much more awareness you have when crossing a road.

The downside is that you'll not be able to shut yourself off from the world and get the most from your music, so these headphones are not recommended as a replacement for regular in-ear headphones, but as an additional purchase for those who want to use them whilst out running.