

Beyerdynamic DT990 headphone [Review]



BEST BEYER?

Mainline your music with Beyerdynamic's new open-back headphone

PRODUCT Beyerdynamic DT990

TYPE Open-back headphone set

PRICE £150

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Confusion arose when these cans were delivered for review. DT990? Been around for years, mate! But no, this is the all-new 2003 model, most immediately distinguished from earlier 990s by the silver-grey earpads. It heralds a substantial revamp of the Beyerdynamic range, topped in fact by the DT880 (£200) and also featuring the DT770 at the same £150 price point. That may seem odd, but while the DT770 is a closed-back model with consequent high isolation, the 990 is an open-back design. It therefore offers much less isolation but in general open-back designs tend to have a more natural frequency balance.

Of course, covering the frequency range is an area where headphones traditionally walk all over speakers, and Beyerdynamic quotes a response for these of 5Hz to 35kHz. Both of those extremes will depend a bit on the interface to your individual ears but the bass in particular beats most speakers by nearly three octaves. Granted it lacks the bodily impact of big speakers, but among other quoted specs, the impedance of 250 ohms means that compatibility is assured with regular hi-fi gear. You can also connect to portables, thanks to the unusually solid 3.5-6.3mm adapter supplied by Beyer.

Comfort scores very highly, with well-judged spring tension and softly padded headband

and earpads. All the same, the coiled lead (single-side entry is a plus) is a little stiff and when stretched to 1.5m exerts a noticeable pull. All components are replaceable and construction is robust. Maximum output exceeds comfortable listening levels.

SOUND QUALITY

There's absolutely no doubt that this is a very capable pair of cans. There are two main ills that seem to affect many headphones – thick textures that lack detail, and/or excessive sibilance in the top octaves. Both are absent here. One could even say that the treble is so clean and neutral as to sound positively recessed with some material, until something like speech or snare drum comes along and shows just what extension is all about.

The problem which this model won't solve, in common with other decent headphones, is shortcomings in recordings – they can be excruciatingly revealing of faults like 'rattly' distortions, noise (though they don't accentuate noise in the way cheap models often do) and sundry whistles, buzzes and burn notes, which subsequently one often finds audible through speakers also. But really all that means is that if you are afraid of finding out the truth about your record collection you should avoid the DT990s.

If, on the contrary, you want to find out exactly what was played at the session you can hardly do better. As a long-term and very frequent user of BD's DT931 model (I use them when editing recordings I've made and can thus vouch for their accuracy) I thought I had little to learn about my favourite discs –

now there's that much less left! A particular favourite test disc is *Ambrosio*, an opera by the Mexican composer Guzmán superbly recorded by genius engineer Bob Katz. I must have heard it well over a hundred times, but I'd never previously noticed a spurious note on the harpsichord which the DT990s rendered clearly audible. But neither had I heard exactly where the male chorus was standing for an atmospheric bit of ensemble, nor what words they are singing.

If you only use headphone for a bit of late-night relaxation, these will do equally well since their neutral balance and lack of spit makes for very comfortable listening. Good value for that: but as full-on high-resolution audio experiences go, an absolute steal. **HFC**

Richard Black

VERDICT	
SOUND >> 90%	
COMFORT >> 89%	
BUILD >> 86%	
VALUE >> 93%	
CONCLUSION For the price of less than a dozen CDs, these headphones provide a top-quality complement to speaker listening and are terrifically informative and musical with it. Admirable in all ways and strongly recommended.	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 90%	