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Austrian Audio Hi-X55

Professional Over-Ear Headphones

Sound and comfort converge in a pair of headphones designed for full-spectrum clarity

REVIEW BY ALEX HAWLEY

Austrian Audio is quickly becoming a household name in the world of pro audio, and for good reasons. Its OC818 and OC18 microphones were the company's first product offerings (reviewed October and December 2019, respectively). Both mics are impressive in terms of sound quality and build design, and these levels of quality and integrity have carried over to its new line of headphones, which debuted at Winter NAMM this year. Intended as all-purpose professional studio headphones suitable for tracking and mixing, the Hi-X50 is an on-ear design and the Hi-X55 is an over-ear model. I've been tracking and mixing with the Hi-X55, on review here.

High Excursion

The Hi-X55 is a closed-back studio headphone designed from the ground up for both sound and comfort. Like Austrian Audio microphones, Hi-X55 headphones are manufactured entirely in Austria. 'Hi-X' stands for 'high excursion', which is in reference to the innovative Hi-X55 driver design. Today's headphone driver designs have been creeping up in size to deliver more bass, but size increases come at the cost of speed and (sometimes) accuracy; there might be more bass energy, but it then becomes more difficult to replicate the entire frequency spectrum with high precision. The engineers at Austrian Audio have concluded that 44mm drivers are the optimal size for bass reproduction while maintaining a tight and fast transient response. The all-new Hi-X55 driver features a ring magnet system that more closely replicates the design of a loudspeaker than a headphone driver. This is paired with a copper-clad aluminum voice coil to reduce the weight of the membrane and allow for a more dynamic reproduction. The result is a 44mm driver that's fast, precise, and can move twice as far as a standard driver. The frequency response is listed as 5Hz-28kHz, with an impedance of 25 ohms. The Hi-X55 comes with a detachable 3.5mm cable and 1/4" adapter.

Comfort

When deciding on a new pair of headphones, comfort is as important as sound. If it isn't comfortable to wear during a marathon tracking or mixing session, it won't do you any good, regardless of the sound quality. Austrian Audio clearly agrees. The Hi-X55 ear cups are made of super-soft, low-retaining foam that conforms to the shape of your head. The area around the ears is large enough that there is no pressure directly on the ears, providing plenty of space so that the ears don't poke out of the bottom or sides; the ears have plenty of room to breathe within the headphones, but the foam contours around them for a nice even seal, which also helps minimize bleed and passively reduce external noise. The headband is padded with the same low-retaining foam, and is evenly balanced to keep pressure off the top of the head. All foam bits are removable for easy cleaning.

The build quality is excellent. All of the critical components, such as the hinges and the headband, are made out of metal. The Hi-X55 is rugged and built to withstand some abuse. It also stands up against smudges and fingerprints, keeping the whole unit looking and feeling clean over time.

The Hi-X55 offers a wide range of flexibility in size adjustments as well. I feel like I have a larger head than most, but found the Hi-X55 to have plenty of adjustability and headroom in that regard. These should be a comfy fit for all heads.

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Sound

The Hi-X55 offers a reasonably neutral response for a closed-back design. Its upper midrange and detailed top end are revealing and forward. Surprising to me is that the low end feels rather subtle. It's present and far-reaching, but I would classify it as being on the lighter side—tight and accurate sounding, but I often found myself turning the volume up a bit louder than usual to get more energy happening down there. The low midrange is also quite polite—balanced and telling without being bloated. The midrange feels neutral throughout, offering plenty of detail and clarity. A slight emphasis kicks in at around 6kHz and extends to roughly 12kHz, which gives the impression of an overall shape that leans to the brighter side, but it doesn't sound pointed or unnatural.

The soundstage, imaging, and isolation are very good. The ear cups do provide a firm seal around the ears, but I still found that very slight amounts of bleed can occur during tracking (as with any headphones). That being said, they do an excellent job of minimizing exterior sounds when mixing or listening to music while out and about. The impedance makes them easy to drive with any device, so they're a great candidate for daily listening in addition to recording and mixing in the studio.

Conclusion

The Hi-X55 is an excellent foray into the headphone market by Austrian Audio. The comfort and build quality are top-notch, and the sound is tight throughout the spectrum with a very detailed upper midrange. While they aren't cheap, I believe they're a great value owing to the craftsmanship and use of high-quality components made in Austria. For production, these headphones are an excellent choice for tracking and mixing sessions, although if you're after a completely transparent mixing reference tool, these may not be it. That being said, they're a joy to listen to, reliable and great for marathon tracking sessions where comfort is king. It's easy to see that the team at Austrian Audio has put the same care and attention to detail into their headphones as they did with their microphones.

Price: $299
More from: austrian.audio

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