

Silver Dragon when in balanced mode. I think the HD650 scales especially well in balanced mode; it opens up the soundstage a bit.

FOR THE PRICE

A

The HD650 is one of the most beautiful sounding headphones that I've ever heard. It seduces you with its sultry tone. It always brings a smile to my face when I use them. At about a hundred dollars more than the HD600, I feel that the HD650 is less impressive. But at the same time, I prefer the HD650's sound signature overall.

QUICK CHECK

- DESIGN: Full-Size
- DRIVERS: Dynamic
- IMPEDANCE: 300 Ohms
- ISOLATION: Little to None
- AMPLIFICATION: Highly Recommended
- MY PREFERRED AMP: TTVJ Millett 307A / SPL Phonitor
- SOUNDS BEST WITH: Jazz, Rock, Metal, Blues, Reggae, R&B, Hip Hop, Pop, Electronic
- CABLES USED: Moon Audio Silver Dragon Balanced / Stock
- REVISIONS KNOWN: At least 1 Known to me (unconfirmed sonic differences)
- FLAGSHIP STATUS: Once Was
- PRODUCTION STATUS AS OF 2012: In Production
- COST: \$499.95 (without aftermarket cable) \$799.95 (with aftermarket cable)

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#20 AKG: K1000

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The K1000 is one of the most unique headphones ever created. The transducers are enclosed, not in a stationary ear-cup, but in a housing that is able to swivel. This design allows for the user to customize the width of their desired soundstage. When the housings are moved to their widest point, the K1000's soundstage can sound quite speaker-like. It is truly impressive - something every headphone collector should hear at some point. However, do not purchase the K1000 without knowing precisely what you're getting into. The K1000 is no ordinary headphone. It requires a lot of power and was, in fact, designed to be powered by a speaker amp, not a headphone amp. In today's expansive and accommodative market, several manufacturers have specifically designed amps in order to power the K1000 and other similarly power-hungry headphones.

My personal experience with the K1000 has been one of frustration and mystification. I've had the opportunity to hear several pairs of K1000s, and I presently own two pairs. Ultimately, I come away each time with the realization that the K1000 has a significant design flaw - Rattle. With every pair that I've listened to, I have noticed that the grills make a rattling sound every once in a while. This rattle occurs regardless of the output volume level. I have discussed this issue with many owners. Most have told me that they have never noticed this rattle-like sound with their pair. However, of the seven pairs I've tried, I have noticed it on each and every one. I managed to significantly reduce the frequency of this rattle with one of my pairs by putting electric tape around the perimeter of the grills on both sides. It doesn't look so sharp, but it reduces the rattle by roughly 75%.

One day at a Head-Fi meet, I came upon a K1000 that appeared to be in excellent condition. After listening to it for about 10 minutes, I noticed that I was not hearing any rattle from this pair. I inquired with the owner about purchasing the headphone from him; sure enough this K1000 was soon my pair. Well, about two days after I purchased it, I started to notice rattling sounds emanating from this new pair. I contacted the seller to ask if he'd ever experienced such a sound. He told me that he did in fact occasionally notice the rattle sound and that it bothered him somewhat. He then told me that several other K1000 owners admitted to hearing the same sound with their respective pairs. In a strange way I was relieved to hear that I wasn't alone in spotting such an obvious issue. I decided to keep this K1000 because it was in such fine condition. Over time, I've noticed that the rattle issue frequently dissuades me from using the K1000.

The soundstage which the K1000 offers is, perhaps, the best in the industry. Had AKG addressed and rectified the rattling issue, the K1000 would most definitely be found in the top 15 on this list. In a sense, the rattling issue bothers me so much, that I considered disqualifying the K1000 from the top 20. Ultimately however, it seems that several owners do not hear/experience this issue. I have had several respected audiophiles and industry professionals listen to my pairs of K1000s; many of them do not hear the rattle whatsoever.

It is also worth mentioning that the K1000 was produced for approximately 15 years. In this time, it underwent at least one design alteration. It is believed that this production change led to the existence of two variations of the K1000. At approximately the #4000 serial number mark, it is believed by many that AKG started using an altered driver which featured a leaner bass response. Both of the K1000s that I own precede this serial number and therefore I cannot confirm this theory. I have never had the opportunity to do an A/B comparison with an earlier and later pair.

STRENGTHS

SOUNDSTAGE KING: The K1000's soundstage is not only the widest that I've heard, but it's also the most customizable. When the K1000's left and right housings are swiveled to their widest point, the resulting soundstage width is ideally-suited for orchestral music and opera. When the housings are swiveled to a narrower position, the soundstage achieved is better-suited for smaller combos. With regard to soundstage customization, the K1000 is probably the most impressive headphone ever made.

NEUTRAL: It seems to me that the K1000 aims to be tonally neutral; it does not miss the mark. It is one of the more neutral headphones I have heard.

IMAGING: The K1000's imaging ability is superb. The angled drivers allow for a finely-contoured listening experience. In order to achieve the most accurate imaging presentation possible, it is crucial that one matches up the angles of the driver housings.

MIDS: While I would not say that the K1000 is at the front rank of the "best mids competition," it does succeed in being relatively uncolored without demonstrating any bothersome peaks or dips. Sometimes however, the K1000 renders vocals with a bit more leanness than I'd prefer.

NATURAL CROSSFEED: Loudspeaker devotees will typically criticize a headphones' performance for the inherent absence of crossfeed between channels. What this criticism refers to is how headphones encompass the ears, leaving each ear without the ability to hear the opposite channel. With natural acoustic sound, the brain analyzes the location of a single sound source by using both ears. When listening to sound with headphones, the brain's ability to analyze the sound's location and dimension is limited. Some dedicated headphone amplifiers feature a built-in simulated crossfeed option, intended to add a realistic quality to the headphone's soundstage presentation. However, because of the fact that the K1000's transducers are placed a considerable distance from the ears, natural crossfeed occurs when listening to them. As a result, for some the K1000 may sound more natural than other headphones.

CLASSICAL MUSIC: Very few headphones can compete with the K1000 with regard to classical music, particularly with large ensemble works.

TREBLE: The K1000's treble is well-extended and nearly free of grain. The treble response of this headphone provides a great sense of air around the instruments.

SERIALIZED: Each K1000 is assigned its own individual serial number. I have heard from several sources that, beginning at approximately serial #4000, the manufacturer began to use an altered transducer, which resulted in a leaner bass response. I have not been able to confirm this from firsthand experience. However, this specific serial number mark would probably coincide with Harman International Industries' acquisition of AKG Acoustics in 1994. Maybe this trivial factoid is significant to understanding the sound change / maybe not.

WEAKNESSES

RATTLE: The worst thing about the K1000, by far, is that there are occasions when the metal grills create a rattle-like sound. This rattle sound resembles the unpleasant muffled vibration achieved by placing an object on resonating piano strings. Considering that this headphone is, all-around, one of the best ever made, it is highly unfortunate that this rattle issue exists. While the rattle is not particularly loud, if you are listening with full attention, you may find it disturbing. The rattle doesn't occur all the time; I can sometimes listen for a while and not hear any rattle. But the fact that it will eventually occur is somewhat distracting. Because of this distraction, I do not use the K1000 all that much.

COMFORT: Unlike most full-size headphones, the K1000 does not feature ear-cups that encompass the ears. Instead, the K1000 features pads that rest near the temples of the skull, while the transducer housings sit adjacent to the ears. Although the K1000's headband is made of a supple material, its elasticity doesn't quite weaken the pressure exerted by temple pads. Due to its heavier than average weight as well as its unusual design, the K1000 is not the last word in comfort. While it may not be quite as uncomfortable as I've made it sound, I do know quite a few ex-owners who sold their K1000 because of comfort issues.

LACKS TRANSPARENCY: Despite its amazing soundstage presentation, the K1000 is not the most transparent headphone I have ever heard. Its overall tonality lacks a sense of naturalness at times.

DIFFICULT TO POWER: The K1000 is a power hungry beast. It was designed by AKG to be connected to a speaker amp! Being as such, you can't use just any old amp to power them. Of the amps which I own, I feel that the Woo Audio 5 drives the K1000 best. The Woo Audio 5 features an output specifically designed to power the K1000; it offers 8 watts per channel at 140 ohms output impedance.

OUT OF PRODUCTION: The K1000 has been long out of production. Despite its popularity and legendary status among audiophiles, Harman Industries (owner of AKG) does not appear to be interested in bringing the K1000 back. However, the good news is that many of the parts are still available for repair/refurbishing purposes.

ON THE FENCE

BASS: The bass quality of the K1000 is very good. However, it does lack extension. Bass-heads will not be pleased with the K1000.

DETAILED: The K1000 offers a uniquely detailed sonic presentation due to its large and tailorable soundstage properties. However, I have noticed that some nuances and intricacies seem to get smeared at times.

STORAGE: The K1000's wood case was offered in a black finish or plain wood finish. Inside the case was a foam interlay, specifically designed to fit and protect the headphone. It's a rugged, but ultimately plain-looking, storage design.

CABLE: Both of my K1000s have aftermarket cables installed. I certainly wish, however, that the K1000 was designed with a user-removable cable design.

FOR THE PRICE

C+

The K1000 is one of those headphones that you either love or hate. Either way, the headphone is known to leave an impression on each and every person who hears it. The rattling issue (discussed in detail above) disturbs me. If it were not for this issue, I would have awarded the K1000 no less than a grade of B in terms of value. For those who appreciate a large soundstage and are prepared to meet the necessary power requirements, the K1000 is worth considering.

QUICK CHECK

- **DESIGN:** Full-Size
- **DRIVERS:** Dynamic
- **IMPEDANCE:** 120 Ohms
- **ISOLATION:** None
- **AMPLIFICATION:** Absolutely Requires Amp
- **MY PREFERRED AMP:** Woo Audio 5
- **SOUNDS BEST WITH:** Classical / Acoustic
- **CABLES USED:** Stefan Audio Art Equinox on 1 Pair / DIY cable on other pair
- **REVISIONS KNOWN:** At least one known to me
- **FLAGSHIP STATUS:** Once Was
- **PRODUCTION STATUS AS OF 2012:** Out Of Production
- **COST:** \$900-\$1500 (estimated)

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