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Thursday 26 June 2008

Photos: Ears-on with the AKG K 701 headphones

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Anyone familiar with Sennheiser's flagship headphones, the HD 650s, will know they're a truly stunning pair of open-back cans for reference and home listening. And we love them with the flaming passion of a thousand burning nymphomaniacs.

But the vixen of the open-back headphone world has some competition in the Crave house: AKG's K 701 -- a pair of similarly priced open-back reference-class headphones. With both priced at roughly £180, some informed decisions will need to be made.

After about 100 hours of burn-in time we're happy to discuss some first impressions of these moist-making headphones. Firstly, design. The 701s are extremely comfortable, with a slightly less tight fit to the head compared to the Sennheiser alternative. And the well-padded earcups are encased in cloth, meaning you're less prone to sweaty ears.

Inside are decent specs too: a frequency response of 10Hz-39kHz, impedance of 62 ohms, a rated sensitivity of 105dB/mW, and a maximum power input of 200mW. The foil diaphragm is dual-layered, hopefully delivering a more impressive transient response than usual.

Listening to music through these headphones is such a pleasure. It's like there's a party in our ears and everyone's making out with supermodels. Every frequency is extremely balanced, with an impressively tight low end, remarkably punchy and powerful mids, and a shimmering high end that doesn't sound harsh or brittle.

Headphones often seem more suited to some types of music and less to others. But the 701s, at least so far, are proving themselves to be great all-rounders for all genres, from rock and metal to dance and pop, to classical and easy listening.

It's early days to be making objective conclusions, but A/B comparisons initially showed the Sennheiser HD 650s to have a noticeably more powerful sound and moderately increased emphasis on bass and the lower mid-range, delivering a slightly warmer, less flat sound. We probably prefer the HD 650s sound, but the differences are subtle and both pairs are equally admirable performers.

Expect a full review soon, where we'll go into much greater detail. Until then do click through for some up-close and personal shots highlighting the physical aspects of these initially impressive headphones. -Nate Lanxon

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Anonymous Mon 30 June, 2008 9:40pm

I wonder if the reviewer will touch on the subject of comfort, specifically during long sessions. If one looks at the headband, the bulges are obvious. The downside is that these bulges are quite tough and, being spherical, all weight from the headphones is on one spot. This is uncomfortable at first, annoying for a while, but can even turn painful. So their position is shifted. The position on the "monk's scalp patch" is bearable, but reclining in a chair will then cause it to slip down to the neck.

A piece of suede velcro-ed over the headband might be a solution. Now to find one.

One can't fault the 701s on the sound, as they deliver clear sound with a stereophonic stage for a good price. Very high bang-for-bucks value.

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Nate Lanxon Mon 30 June, 2008 10:27pm

Honestly, I found them comfortable for up to about 3 hours at a time, but I've not given them the "6 hour test" I'll give them when they're being reviewed. They're certainly not as tight as the Sennheiser HD 650s, though it must be said that the 650s remain comfortable after hours despite their tightness.

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