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AKG N40 review

With the right source, these AKGs are awesome **Tested at £350**

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Our Verdict

The demanding nature of these AKG earphones makes them a niche option, but the N40s sound awesome if you treat them right

For

- Excellent build
- Comfortable as in-ears get
- Capable of stunning sound

Against

- Need a serious source to get more than mediocrity from them
- Swappable filters seem unnecessary

JUMP TO

Reviewed on **9th September 2016**

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With many of us listening to music while out and about, it's little wonder a market for premium earphones has emerged and appears to be going strong in the sales stakes.

After all, why wouldn't you want the best quality possible at the times that you do most of your listening?

- ▲ There is, however, an issue here: while you might have the best earphones for the job when you're out and about, do you have the best music player? In fact, do you have a source that's even talented enough to drive those high-end headphones?

But let's take a closer look at the AKG N40 in-ear headphones and come back to that later.

Build





You might expect a £350 purchase to impress you from the moment you open the box, and the AKG N40 earphones don't disappoint. The packaging acts almost like a presentation case, displaying the assorted contents for maximum cooing effect.

The N40s are smart looking headphones; mostly plastic in construction, but lightweight as a result and made to look fancier with a shiny silver finish.

They're comfortable, too, with the fitted over-ear hooks keeping the buds secure and perfectly positioned to create an effective seal without any discomfort.

Those hooks running over your ear also act as dampeners to prevent vibrations spoiling the sound. That's great for those using these AKG earphones on public transport or any other loud environment.

MORE: [Best headphone deals: in-ear, over-ear, wireless and more](http://www.whathifi.com/news/best-headphone-deals-in-ear-over-ear-wireless-and-more) (<http://www.whathifi.com/news/best-headphone-deals-in-ear-over-ear-wireless-and-more>)

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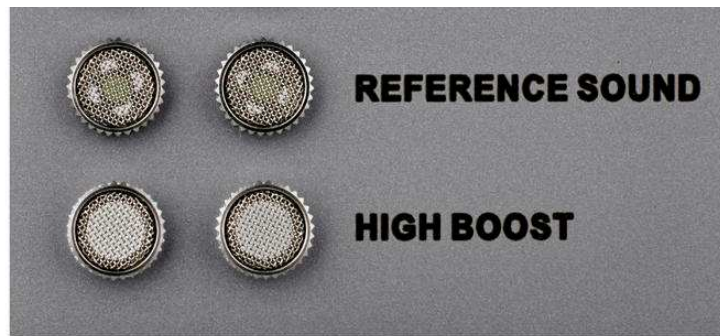


The headphones themselves are only part of the AKG N40 story, though, because the accessories are also key.

You get a selection of ear buds in four different sizes, plus a cleaning tool, flight adapter, compact carry case and two cables – one 'straight' option and one with a mic and three-button remote that can be used with either Android or iPhone via a little switch on the back.

MORE: [5 of the best iPod alternatives](http://www.whathifi.com/best-buys/5-best-ipod-alternatives) (<http://www.whathifi.com/best-buys/5-best-ipod-alternatives>)





But perhaps the bigger selling point is the fact that you can swap the earphones' filters to tweak the sound.

Installed in the factory are the standard, or 'Reference Sound', filters, but you also get tiny pairs of 'Bass Boost' and 'High Boost' filters that can be swapped-in to give more oomph to the bottom or top ends.

This is nothing new. Around a year ago we reviewed the £45 [Rock Jaw Alfa Genus](http://www.whathifi.com/rock-jaw/alfa-genus/review) (<http://www.whathifi.com/rock-jaw/alfa-genus/review>) earphones, which took the very same approach. And we remain unconvinced by the concept.

If you like bassy headphones, buy bassy headphones. If you want trebly headphones, buy trebly headphones. If you want good, honest neutral headphones... well, you get the point.

MORE: [Best headphones 2016](http://www.whathifi.com/best-buys/best-headphones) (<http://www.whathifi.com/best-buys/best-headphones>)

More after the break



Sound



Once run-in, the AKG N40 in-ears with the Reference Sound filters installed sound rather fantastic – when driven by a suitable source.

Listening to the earphones plugged directly into an [iPhone](http://www.whathifi.com/apple/iphone-6s/review) (<http://www.whathifi.com/apple/iphone-6s/review>) or [Samsung Galaxy S7](http://www.whathifi.com/samsung/galaxy-s7/review) (<http://www.whathifi.com/samsung/galaxy-s7/review>) (or even a MacBook) - gives you a rather flat and unengaging sound with a treble that is rather hard and incessant.

Rated on this performance alone, the AKGs wouldn't be getting a five-star rating, but bolster your source with a [DAC](#)

(<http://www.whathifi.com/products/hi-fi/dacs>), such as the [Audioquest DragonFly Red](http://www.whathifi.com/audioquest/dragonfly-red/review) (<http://www.whathifi.com/audioquest/dragonfly-red/review>), and the N40s spring into life.

Play Radiohead's [Burn the Witch](https://open.spotify.com/track/3dAxzv7hkxipbuWJaOMzAl) (<https://open.spotify.com/track/3dAxzv7hkxipbuWJaOMzAl>) and the track's threatening, string-led energy grabs you by the lapels from the off.

That spaciousness remains, with Thom Yorke's haunting, echoey vocals given plenty of room to breathe in the midst of the carefully orchestrated instrumental chaos around it.

MORE: [What is a DAC? Everything you need to know](http://www.whathifi.com/advice/dacs-everything-you-need-to-know) (<http://www.whathifi.com/advice/dacs-everything-you-need-to-know>)



Switch to Nick Cave and Warren Ellis' soundtrack for [The Road](https://open.spotify.com/album/7digF2mQnQcgE56QIWAK8j) (<https://open.spotify.com/album/7digF2mQnQcgE56QIWAK8j>) and the AKG's have the detail recovery and low-level dynamics necessary to deliver the texture and raw beauty of this recording.

There's plenty of weight at the bottom even if you avoid the 'Bass Boost' filters (and you should avoid them), but the lowest notes could do with just a little more impact in the leading edge.

That treble, conversely, is far less hard once you've got a capable source – there are rare occasions that it stands out just a touch, but overall the delivery has great range and impressive balance.

MORE: [Best portable music players](http://www.whathifi.com/best-buys/best-portable-music-players) (<http://www.whathifi.com/best-buys/best-portable-music-players>)

Verdict

The AKG N40 earphones sound great, but they'll work best for the sort of listener who packs into their pocket not just a phone full of hi-res tunes, but also a decent portable DAC.

If that's you, we applaud your dedication to the hi-fi cause and recommend you give these premium in-ears an audition just as soon as you can.

Buy the N40 earphones here from AKG (<http://uk.akg.com/in-ear/AKG+N40.html>)

MORE: [9 of the best in-ear headphones](http://www.whathifi.com/best-buys/best-in-ear-headphones) (<http://www.whathifi.com/best-buys/best-in-ear-headphones>)

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The Competition



Breakdown

Grado SR325e Sound (/grado/sr325e/review)	Sennheiser IE 800 Comfort (/sennheiser/ie-800/review)	Noble Audio Trident (/noble-audio/trident/review)
Our Rating	Our Rating	Our Rating
Build User Rating: 76%	Build User Rating: 0%	Build User Rating: 0%
Price from £278 (/grado/compare-prices)	Price from £269.95 (/sennheiser/ie-800/compare-prices)	Price from £199 (/noble-audio/trident/compare-prices)

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(Ritz Carlton on Vogue)

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of your design later to him. On the face of it you are right, but it would be sorry to interpret the woman as indifference or callousness. You know yourself but it would be fine. What is this to say after all that has happened. That's alright. Now, at least that some sort of a Jewish Project has been selected, teaching in theory all the time of Osh. At present it's a small thing. If he were with us it would have been a great help. I don't know the details that

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