

Ultrasono Proline 750/2500

Headphones that promise you teeth-shattering level and isolation are more common than ones that suggest you'll need lower levels and that they could even be better for your health. ZENON SCHOEPE plugs in and forgets he's got them on.



ULTRASONE WILL BE known among people who know about headphones for two main reasons — S-Logic 'Natural Surround Sound' and reduced emissions. The first of these pertains to the German company's use of decentralised drivers that allow the listener's ear shape to take a more active role in the listening process, just as it does when you listen normally, rather than firing the sound straight into your lug hole. The emissions issue is one of those topics that either stirs you or it doesn't. Put it this way, a variety of commonly encountered devices, like computer monitors, emit magnetic radiation and most of these have to meet regulatory emissions standards for health issues. While we don't walk around with computer monitors displays clamped to our craniums, we do walk around with headphones stuck on for extended periods and they do emit magnetic radiation and they are not currently regulated. Ultrasono claims that its Mu shielding reduces magnetic emissions by up to 98% compared to other products. Come to your own conclusions.

It's a peculiar fact that much of the appraisal of a pair of cans is actually made before you even put them on as it is the feel and weight distribution that you'll see people taking stock off as they are first handed a pair. It's true that if you like the way they feel you are immediately predisposed favourably to them. It's why long haul flights are made worse by those terrible clip-on contraptions that you have to perch on your ears and why you'll never be convinced by the integrity of a high-end mic or processor if you are handed a pair of cheap, hard plastic clamps to listen through.

The Ultrasono Proline 750 and 2500 score very highly in this respect. They're not featherlight but neither are they heavy; they're about right and they combine hard surfaces with exquisitely smooth soft areas. Adjustability of the band is simple and independent on both sides rather than the wholly inadequate 'springed' arrangement that you will still find on some models. This click-stopped adjustment means you can offset the band slightly for comfort.

One of the selling points of the company's DJ range of headphone is that you can fold one of the cups up, pad side towards the head, for single ear listening. While you can't achieve precisely this effect with these models, I found I could fold a cup up into the band although doing this you get the hard side of the cup pressing against you head. I could live with this, you might not.

This ability to fold the cups up makes for very tidy and compact storage and the fact that each cup also pivots through 90 degrees means that you can also hang them up efficiently.

It's worth mentioning the extent of the packaging that comes with both of these models. In the box, you get a replacement set of ear pads (they simply twist out), straight and coiled cables that screw in to the left cup, a standard to mini jack stereo adapter, and a carry bag.

Specs on the Proline 750 and 2500 are nigh on identical in that both claim a 8-35,000Hz frequency range (no tolerances given) and an impedance of 40Ohms with 40mm titanium-plated drivers. Both have a Mu metal bufferboard to reduce emissions and both have S-Logic technology. The difference is that the 750s are closed back and the 2500s are open back.

The ear cushions are deeply quilted and very comfortable to wear for extended periods of time although my ears still got as hot in these as they do in any others. While sound quality in headphones is important I believe it means nothing if you can't bear wearing the things. I still remember buying my

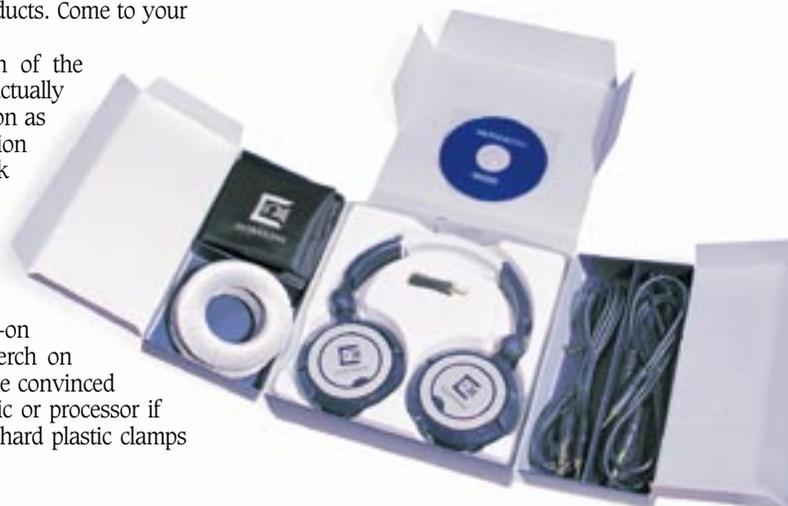
very first pair of expensive 'quality' headphones 'mail order' having never tried them on. To this day I don't believe my nose would have grown quite as large as it did if it hadn't been for the years of head clamping and squeezing that they exerted on my skull. You have to try headphones before you buy and it's worth trying new models regularly to keep tabs on how the art and science is progressing.

These are very fine sounding phones and it's interesting to be able to compare open and closed back models quite this directly. Rather predictably, the effects are precisely as you would expect with a lightening of the sound field with the open design and a more intimate experience with the closed version. The general response is otherwise very similar. Now, I've always been a closed headphone kind of guy and always feel that I'm going to 'fall out' of open designs (if that makes any sense to you). I prefer the enclosed experience even though I know it can have limitations. For this reason, I prefer the 750s to the 2500s.

The S-Logic experience is very difficult to quantify or compare directly to other brand headphones. Certainly, stereo width is superb and I would go with Ultrasono's claim that you can get away with using lower SPLs for the same amount of information. If this is due to the intensification of the listening experience, as they put it, then they've got a point. You're getting a lot of detail and they'll show up inadequacies deep in your track if they're there. For some reason, I found them particularly good at spotting phase anomalies and revealing crass reverb tails on MP3s. Headphones to have beside your desk, then, and not for taking out with your iPod.

It's a satisfying headphone to listen to and definitely less tiring long-term than most other cans although this could be due to a combination of lower levels and extreme comfort. Perhaps the most revealing thing I can say is that on occasion I got up and started walking around having forgotten that I was still 'connected'; with predictable consequences.

I would describe both models as 'monitor' headphones — ones that you can make decisions on and not have to make allowances for — and at Euro 299 each this is what you would expect. I do like them. You ought to try some. ■



PROS Excellent package of parts; excellent detailed performance; highly adjustable and comfortable.

CONS It's a shame you can't go 'one-eared' on these as elegantly as you can on the DJ models.

Contact

ULTRASONE, GERMANY
Website: www.ultrasone.com