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Review: Pro Tech NoiseBuster Headphones

Getting great sound in an airplane at 35,000 feet doesn't require shelling out \$300 for a high-end Bose noise-cancellation headset.

By James Turner

[Personal Tech Pipeline](#)

Getting a good audio experience in the passenger cabin of a jet aircraft has, to date, followed one of two strategies. The purely mechanism approach is to use some kind of tight-fitting earbud that seals out noise from the outside, leaving only the output of your iPod or other audio source to assault your inner ear. Many of us, however, find earbuds uncomfortable or ill-fitting under the best of circumstances.

The high tech approach is active noise cancellation (ANR). First used in headset for pilots, ANR plays a bit of acoustic black magic with the incoming signal. Essentially, it uses a microphone on the outside of the headphones to sample the ambient noise environment, and generates a signal on top of the audio source that cancels out the outside cacophony.

The traditional wisdom is that in the consumer ANR market, there is Bose and then there is everyone else. Bose capitalizes on this perception, pricing their Quiet Comfort II at a list price of \$299. The "everyone else" has included products from Sony as well as no-name vendors, which are generally considered to be vastly inferior to the Bose product.

Not having \$300 in folding money to shell out for the luxury of having a quiet flight the few times I year I travel, I've never had the pleasure of trying out the Bose product, but I have tried an early Sony ANR with disappointing results. So it was with significant interest that I unpacked a new ANR headset from Pro Tech Communications, the NoiseBuster.

The NoiseBuster is similar to most padded full-cup headphones intended for portable use. It swivels and folds up into a neat package that fits into an included nylon travel bag. It also comes with a dual-prong adaptor for use with airline seat rests. The unit runs off a single AAA battery. After 6 hours of use it was still going strong, as were my ears. There was no discomfort, and the headset was not at all awkward to keep in position.



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The real question, of course, is how they perform in noisy environments. I started by testing in my office with the air conditioner on. There was a noticeable drop in the low end volume of the AC as soon as I switched the unit on. I could still hear the high-frequency noise, but all the low rumbling was gone. This is consistent with the specifications for the headphones, which indicate the ANR is active between 40 and 1,200 Hz. The quality of the source audio was fine.

For a more strenuous test of the headset's ability, I took a CD with 15 minutes of aircraft cabin interior noise, and cranked it up to 85 dB (well above the 75dB of a modern jet cabin). As before, a noticeable hiss was audible from the high frequency noise, but the overall volume dropped impressively. Podcasts that were totally inaudible with the unit turned off became crystal clear once the power came on. I look forward to trying them out on my next long plane ride.

The only major downside is the lack of any volume control on the cord, but that's not much of a complaint to make. Having never used the Bose unit, I can't compare the degree of noise cancellation, but the NoiseBuster is definitely a vast improvement over the Sony unit I've used for years. Pro Tech claims it offers the best noise reduction on the market, which may -- or may not -- be just so much marketing hype. But with a list price of \$69, less than a quarter the price of the Bose model, it is certainly good value for the money.

Pro Tech Communications NoiseBuster, \$69 MSRP,
www.protechcommunications.com

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