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Saturday, October 23, 2004

PRODUCTS, TRENDS & TECHNOLOGY

NoiseBuster headphones are easy on the ears



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When it comes to noise-canceling headphones, most people think Bose is the gold standard.

The company initially developed noise-reduction headphones for use by pilots, then created a version for consumers. But with a \$300 price tag, you need a pilot's paycheck to afford a pair.

That's why I was delighted to find a pair of noise-canceling headphones that perform almost as well as the Bose phones for a lot less money. The new NoiseBuster headphones from Pro Tech Communications carry a list price of \$69.



NoiseBuster headphones block out unwanted sound.

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Like Bose, the NoiseBuster NB-FX uses active-noise-reduction technology to identify and cancel unwanted environmental noise.

The headphones contain a small battery-powered microphone that hears and identifies the audio signature of the noise around you. It could be the sound of an airplane engine, a subway train or highway traffic.

Built-in electronic circuits then counter the offending sound by producing an opposite sound wave. The competing waves nearly cancel out each other.

The outside sounds don't disappear, but they become much less audible. The roar of a lawn mower, for instance, becomes a low hum.

I used the NoiseBuster phones last weekend when I cut my grass, and I was able to clearly hear music and radio programs, despite the sound of the mower, without cranking the volume all the way up on my portable audio player.

The NoiseBuster headphones have an open-back design that makes them lighter and more comfortable than headphones with cups that completely enclose the ear. Their smaller size also makes them more convenient for travel.

The headband also has a hinge in the center, which allows the phones to fold up for storage in a carry bag.

NoiseBuster's earlier models had the electronics and battery compartment built into a box that dangled from the headphone cable. The box was annoying and had to be clipped to your belt or shirt pocket.

The new NB-FX model has all of the electronics and battery compartment built into the ear cups or headband.

The NoiseBuster can be ordered online from **Pro Tech** and are scheduled to be in retail stores later this year.

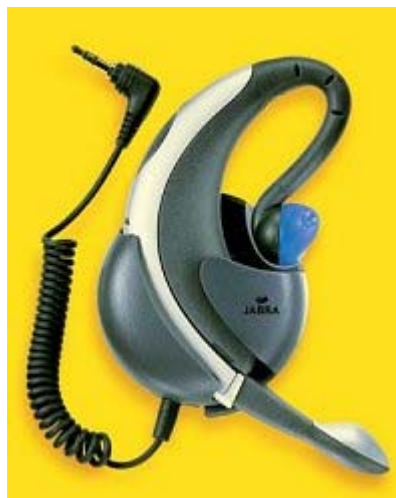
Jabra headset cuts the wire

Jabra's new headset for cell phones won't blot out noise, but it does deliver clear sound to your ear without the tangle of annoying cables.

The new generation of cell phones equipped with Bluetooth technology can communicate wirelessly with Bluetooth-equipped headsets. The new Jabra FreeSpeak BT200 is a wireless headset that works with older phones that don't have Bluetooth.

The FreeSpeak has an earpiece and microphone that fits comfortably behind either ear. A soft gel nub that slips inside the ear helps mask outside noise.

A link is established with the phone through a small disc-shaped transmitter that plugs into the phone's audio jack. The disc doubles as a charging cradle for the earpiece.



Jabra's BT200 brings Bluetooth to non-Bluetooth phones.

A switch on the back side of the earpiece lets you initiate a call (if you have voice recognition) or end the call without touching your phone. The transmitter works up to 30 feet away from the phone.

The BT200 has a list price of \$149. The BT250, for phones that have Bluetooth, costs about \$50 less.

Ric Manning's technology column runs Saturday.

Phone: 502-582-4240

E-mail: ricman@courier-journal.com

Online: Ask Ric a question at courier-journal.com/ric

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