

Plantronics BackBeat Pro 2 SE Review

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THE GOOD:

- Loud, warm audio
- Good active noise cancelling
- Intuitive smart controls
- Extremely long battery life

THE BAD:

- Heavy

VERDICT:

The Plantronics BackBeat Pro 2 SE headphones offer great sound, excellent smart controls and over 24 hours of battery life.

RATING: 8/10 (Totally Worth It)

Sleeker, sexier, but just as techie-friendly, the \$249 Plantronics BackBeat Pro 2 SE headphones keep the intuitive integrated smart controls I know and love while refining the overall design. But the company didn't stop there, as it retooled the audio to deliver warm sound with just the right amount of bass. Plantronics also made sure to add some solid active noise cancelling for when you need peace and quiet. Coupled with the aggressive price, the Pro 2s are great for work, play and everything in between.

Design

While functional as all get out, past iterations of the BackBeat Pros were never the most stylish cans on the block. But the Pro 2 SEs are downright sexy, mixing old and new design cues. The headband retains the plush, gray leatherette band swirling in a diagonal pattern with the soft gray mesh, which is good for wicking away any sweat drops. The yolks supporting the ear cups are constructed from gray matte plastic, which conceals the aluminum extenders inside.

Plantronics ditched the circular ear cups in favor of a more mature oval design. The majority of each ear cup consists of gray plastic, but the actual cap combines delicate wire mesh, shiny plastic and an elegant faux-wood panel. I particularly like the chrome PLT logo on the right cap. The ear cups consist of pillowy memory foam wrapped in gray leatherette. In case you actually want to use the bundled 3.5mm audio cable, the port is located at the bottom of the right ear cup, next to the micro USB port.

Similar to what you'd find on its predecessors, the BackBeat Pro 2's ear cups are on a swiveling joint, so they can fold flat for easy storage in the included fabric travel bag.

The regular BackBeat Pro 2s (\$199) are available in a striking black and brown color scheme, which I actually prefer. The sides of those ear cups have a funky texture that I love to run my fingers over. They also lack NFC functionality, which is a bit of a bummer. As much as I like the Pro 2's new look, however, it's not a conversation starter like the designs of the Parrot Zik 3.0 or the V-Moda Crossfade Wireless.

Controls and Sensors

The BackBeat Pro 2 SEs still have all the smart features I've come to know and love. For instance, pressing the right ear cup still answers or ignores incoming phone calls. The right-mounted power button still pulls double-duty; you can initiate Bluetooth pairing by holding the switch upward for 2 seconds.

Directly below the power switch is the bright-red OpenMic button, which allows you to adjust how much ambient noise enters your active-noise-cancelled bubble. I activated this mode when I was walking home so I could remain aware of my surroundings, especially while crossing streets with bike lanes.

The left ear cup does a lot of the heavy lifting, with the center button acting as the play/pause control. A quick press on the left or right side of the center ring will skip forward or backward on the track, respectively. The integrated NFC chip also

resides in the left cup. Some of my favorite features, the smart sensors, are embedded into the plush lining of the ear cup. They pause your music as soon as you remove the cup from your ear.

Comfort and Cables

At 19.2 ounces, the BackBeat Pro 2 SE has a bit of heft to it, especially when weighed against the 10.9-ounce Bose QuietComfort 35 headphones or the 10.4-ounce V-Moda Crossfade Wireless.

However, I've worn the Pro 2 SEs for weeks and never felt like I was being weighted down. On the contrary, the soft leatherette constantly cradled my ears. And when I wasn't actively wearing the cans on my ears, the cups rested just behind them, pressing gently. I've worn the Pro 2 SE for 2 hours straight on the way home to Jersey with no ill effect.

While the Pro 2 SEs are wireless, they ship with a 3.5mm audio cord just in case the battery dies unexpectedly. However, I wish the cable had an in-line remote for skipping tracks and answering calls.

Noise Cancellation

The Pro 2 SEs' active noise cancelling (ANC) technology can put a serious kibosh on an otherwise noisy situation. The cans have saved me from many a loud talker on the New York City subway and helped me establish an island of calm at my desk during work hours. When I wasn't playing music, the ANC lacked the annoying white hiss that a lot of competing headsets use to keep the outside world at bay.

These headphones were no match, however, for the QC 35 cans and the vacuum-like cancellation those headphones provide. I could still hear most of a conversation taking place in my office with the Pro 2's ANC, but I could barely make out a word when wearing the Bose.

Performance

With every iteration of the BackBeat Pro, Plantronics is tinkering to get as close to perfect as possible. On the Pro 2 SEs, that means warm audio overall that can be a little muddy at times.

As I listened to Pentatonix's "Can't Sleep Love," my ears were caressed by warm, flowing harmonies with some unexpected oomph on the low end. When the background vocals came in, the soundscape was a bit crowded, but not unbearably so. As is typical with Bose headphones, the same track on the QC 35 cans was cooler, with more balance and precision.

Switching over to Jamiroquai's "Corner of the Earth," the Pro 2 SE delivered muddy, aggressive strings alongside clear percussion and vocals. The horns were a bit harsh for my taste, especially when combined with the strings. The QC 35s gave a more balanced presentation; however, that coolness made the sound seem distant.

The bass on Ludacris' "Grew Up a Screw Up" on the BackBeat Pro 2 SEs delivered that thumping knock that I was looking for, perfectly punctuating the vocals.

Battery/Bluetooth

Now here's a headphone that can last a full workday and long into the night after. Boasting 24 hours of battery life, the Pro 2 SEs went without charging for a full two weeks after I started using them, even after several flights. By comparison, the QC 35 headphones are rated for 20 hours of battery life, which isn't too shabby.

The Pro 2 SEs boast a Bluetooth range of up to 330 feet, which allowed me to walk from one end of the office to the other without losing the signal.

Call Quality

The BackBeat Pro 2 SEs also shine in call quality. Neither rain, nor sleet, nor NYC's infamous wind-tunnel streets will keep the Pro 2 from delivering crystal-clear sound when you're taking or making phone calls. When I called my Nana's landline, she reported that she could hear me "just fine." However, she also mentioned hearing some cars honking in the background, which is to be expected since I was near the Holland Tunnel exit during rush hour.

Bottom Line

The Plantronics BackBeat Pro 2 SE headphones are a great example of style, functionality and tech done right. For \$249, the Pro 2s offer up to 24 hours of battery life, great active noise cancelling technology and excellent sound to boot. The company also retooled the design for a more fashion-friendly look while retaining the smart controls and NFC from previous iterations that made these headphones a hit in the first place.

However, if you're looking for pin-drop quiet and a more precise sound, you'll want to check out the Bose QuietComfort 35 headphones. The \$349 cans are the gold standard for ANC technology and deliver audio that's accurate, but a little quiet. Overall, the Plantronic BackBeat Pro 2 SE headphones deliver premium features and audio at a fraction of the price, and they deserve to be in your music rotation.

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