

Product Review: Plantronics BackBeat Fit Bluetooth Headphones

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Published Date and Time:

5/20/15

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<http://winsupersite.com/hardware/product-review-plantronics-backbeat-fit-bluetooth-headphones> ^[4]

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Recently, I detailed the gadgets and accessories I carry with me when I take my daily runs. In [Running with the Microsoft Band: Additional Accessories](#) ^[5], I talked about my choice of sport earbuds. At that time, I was using the Jabra Sport Bluetooth Earbuds. I loved them. A day before my trip to San Francisco a couple weeks ago, the Jabra earbuds finally died. I had used them for a couple years and had grown extremely attached to them. As I stated in the previous article, the Jabra earbud model I was using is no longer manufactured and have been replaced with a set that is clearly overpriced at about 3 times what I originally paid. I've sworn off Jabra because of that and had already decided to find something else should my old pair become unusable. The left earbud just stopped producing audio, clearly a short in the cable, and with the molded plastic not something I could easily fix myself. But, with a single day at home between trips just to catch up on laundry and repack for a longer trip to Chicago, I needed a new set of running earbuds quickly.

You might also remember that I [recently reviewed the iClever headset](#) ^[6], which is strikingly similar to the Jabra model and produces great sound at a much cheaper price. I said at that time that if the Jabra's ever died, I'd opt for those – and that was my intent. But, unfortunately, my time was short and I needed something I could buy locally (plus, I'd given my review set to my wife and she uses them regularly). The iClever headset is only available for order and not found in regular stores. So, turned to social media and lobbied Twitter.

What I ended up with came from recommendations over Twitter, and after spending a couple weeks with the new earbuds, I'm really enjoying them. There is a single caveat (which I'll get into shortly), but overall the design and function is excellent.

What I settled on are the [Plantronics BackBeat Fit Bluetooth Headphones](#) ^[7]. The Plantronics fit within my normal criteria, which includes: Bluetooth, self-contained, flexible, long-lasting battery, waterproof/sweatproof, on-ear controls, and activity stability (i.e., won't fall out from vigorous activity). Plus, I found them in stock at an AT&T store in my hometown.

The Plantronics package comes with the headphones, a USB cable, an armband, and the instruction manual.

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I hadn't expected an armband to be included in the price, so that was a definite plus. Noted in my [Running with the Microsoft Band: Additional Accessories](#) ^[5] article, I've been using a [Sporteer Velocity armband](#) ^[8] for a long while and have been content with it. But, this Plantronics-supplied armband gave me an opportunity to try something new. And, I'm now glad I did. The actual Velcro band on the armband is long enough to fit just about any arm diameter, which means that it also supports wearing layers of clothing. It was unseasonably cool in San Francisco, so I had to wear a couple long-sleeve running shirts. The Plantronics armband fit perfectly and had plenty of Velcro left to spare.

One thing that the armband doesn't have is a see-through cover, which I would normally use for touchscreen activity (like replying to texts) directly on my smartphone. But, since acquiring the Microsoft Band with Cortana support, I really don't need that anymore. When texts come in now, I just "speak to the band" and give Cortana verbal instructions, asking her to read the text to me and then subsequently managing my responses.

Additionally, the armband has a secret slot inside so you can stow a hotel key card, credit cards, and a photo ID, which has been a standard requirement for me for armbands. When I take runs while traveling, I always use these slots in the event I need to stop and pay for a water bottle using a credit card. It also helps me avoid losing my hotel key if it decides to jostle out of a pocket while running.

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The headset seems to have endless battery life. And, charging is quick. I'm a control freak when it comes to keeping gadgets charged. After a couple hour run, it takes less than a half hour for the Plantronics to hit full charge again. That's pretty significant compared to my experiences with other headsets.

The Caveat: As I stated earlier there is one drawback to this headset – and frankly it's just a personal thing. When I run, I like to become immersed in the music, which means I generally select earbuds that insert inside the ear canal to keep out extraneous noises. I know, I know. I've been told a hundred or more times that a) this can lead to diminished hearing, and b)

it's not safe to not be able to hear traffic noise. Plantronics designed these headphones with safety in mind. Instead of inserting directly into the ear canal, they sit just outside and blast audio into the ear, allowing traffic noise to filter in. I've since gotten used to this and is not as big a deal for me now as it was. But, this also has another effect. I attempted to use the Plantronics to listen to a movie I was watching on a flight from Cincinnati to San Francisco. There was just no way I could even hear the movie over the plane noise. So, while in San Francisco I picked up a pair of Ecko Unltd Runner Bluetooth Headphones just for audio immersion for the trip home. The Ecko headset does insert directly into the ear canal which eliminates outside noise and I was able to enjoy a full length movie without straining to hear. I'll be reviewing these shortly.

Bottom Line

The [Plantronics BackBeat Fit Bluetooth Headphones](#) [7] have resulted in a great choice, and a good reason why I trust my patriots on social media. Except for the audio immersion, they are a solid choice for anyone wanting a tether-free experience for fitness activities. And, the extra amenities like the included armband case, the long-lasting battery, and the standard USB port make it a great value, too.

You can find these on Amazon for around \$95: [Plantronics BackBeat Fit Bluetooth Headphones](#) [7]

Language:

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- [3] <http://newsroom.poly.com/category/news-category/%5Bcatpath-raw%5D-2>
- [4] <http://winsupersite.com/hardware/product-review-plantronics-backbeat-fit-bluetooth-headphones>
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