

Technobubble Wrap: Leaving on a jet plane? Backbeat Pro 2 cuts the noise

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As someone who has flown around the world over the years, I've developed a personal list of niggles about the air travel experience.

The security song-and-dance at the TSA checkpoints. That kid who kicks the back of your chair. All that ambient noise inside the airline cabin. Then there are the fees on top of fees that airline companies seem to be layering on top of everything now like food, baggage and oxygen. OK, I'm kidding about the oxygen part but hey, you never know.

Sadly, there's really not much I can do about most of these. Well, there was that one time I glared through the gap between my seat like Jack Nicholson in *The Shining* at this kick-happy kid who quickly behaved soon after. For the most part, though, I really can't do much about many of the things that bug me about air travel.

Then again, I can minimize some of it. Take the noise problem, for example. I've found that having ANC or active noise-cancelling headphones make that issue a lot more bearable. On that note, this week's gadget and gaming roundup looks at a new pair of cans plus two new games that give a nod to old-school gaming.

Plantronics Backbeat Pro 2

Regular readers of this space know that I typically rock the V-Moda Crossfade M-100 for everyday use. When traveling by air, however, I always whip out the noise-cancelling headphones.

I've used several ANC cans over the years, the latest of which are the Plantronics Backbeat Pro 2. The headphones boast what Plantronics calls "high-resolution sound," which awfully sounds like marketing speak but turned out to be an appropriate way to describe the Backbeat Pro 2's audio profile. The headphones feature nice clean sound with excellent separation, allowing you to better discern details in your tunes. Bass is healthy but not overpowered, which makes this a good option for non-bassheads. In a sense, it's a bit similar to the audio profile of the Plantronics RIG 500E gaming headset. Folks who listen to music on their smartphone will be happy with the Pro 2 as it sounds nice even on stock music apps. It also has a wireless option with built-in controls in addition to a wired connection. Pair it with a good MP3 with an equalizer like the Sansa Clip and it sounds even better.

Unlike some ANC headphones I've tried in the past, I didn't notice a large difference in audio quality when noise cancelling is turned on or off. It seems like you get more bass when ANC is off but that could just be from the ambient hum of unfiltered noise. One plus is that you get a voice prompt when ANC is turned on or off, which gives you a much welcome heads up.

Fit is comfortably snug and build quality feels solid. The look uses a mix of modern design combined with some old-school touches like a wood-style accent that harkens from the 1970s and 1980s. That part might be hit or miss, depending on your taste.

The ANC does a good job in reducing ambient sounds, which works even better as the headphones already block a decent amount of noise even when it's turned off. It won't block every sound but it blocks enough to make your plane ride more comfortable. Battery life is also excellent at more than 20 hours, allowing you to take one long trip and back without having to recharge. It even has an automatic function that senses when you take the headphones off, which pauses whatever tune you're listening to while turning off ANC.

The case is not a hard one, unfortunately, but it is one of the nicer soft pouches I've seen, including a soft interior liner. The earcups also don't fold but they do rotate for easier storage and handling when not in use.

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