

Plantronics BackBeat Pro 2 review: The value alternative to Bose's QuietComfort 35

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CNET EDITOR'S RATING: 4 / 5 Stars

- OVERALL: 8.5
- DESIGN: 8.0
- FEATURES: 9.0
- SOUND: 8.0
- VALUE: 9.0



THE GOOD: The Plantronics BackBeat Pro 2 sounds very good for a Bluetooth headphone, is comfortable to wear and offers decent noise cancellation and strong battery life. It performs very well as headset for making cell phone calls, includes a carrying pouch, and is an overall excellent value.

THE BAD: While the design has been improved, the headphone is still a little heavy and its aesthetics may not appeal to everyone; noise-canceling isn't quite as effective as Bose's.

THE BOTTOM LINE: The BackBeat Pro 2 is an excellent full-size wireless noise-cancelling headphone that costs nearly half as much as comparable models from Bose, Sony or Sennheiser.

In the realm of [headphones](#) ^[5], noise-canceling models -- those battery-powered ones that filter out unwanted external sounds like traffic din or jet-engine noise -- represent the cream of the crop. And the best wireless noise-cancelling headphones from [Bose](#) ^[6], [Sony](#) ^[7], [Sennheiser](#) ^[8], [Parrot](#) ^[9] and others tend to cost at least \$350 (about £290 or AU\$460). But not everybody wants to pay that much for a headphone, which is where Plantronics' [BackBeat Pro 2](#) ^[4] comes in.

Priced at \$200, £230 or AU\$250, the BackBeat Pro 2 is being positioned as a premium headphone for less. The original [BackBeat Pro](#) ^[10] was, too -- and it was a good headphone for the money, despite being pretty bulky and not all that stylish. Nevertheless, it had a strong following among techie types who cared more about how it performed than how it looked.

With this new model Plantronics has slimmed the headphone down by about 35 percent, reduced its weight by about 15 percent, and made it more attractive. It also sounds very good for a [Bluetooth](#) ^[11] headphone, with relatively clean, dynamic, well-balanced sound that rivals the quality of its higher-priced competitors. And it worked nearly flawlessly for me, with minimal Bluetooth hiccups.

It's comfortable, too, and has sensors that pause and resume your music when you take the headphones off or put them on (you can also answer a call by simply putting them on your ears). And while the noise-canceling isn't as effective as that of the [Bose QuietComfort 35](#) ^[6], it does a decent job muffling ambient noise without creating an audible hiss.

I've been using it in the office for the past few days and haven't suffered any listening fatigue -- from either the sound or the fit. It's definitely a good work headphone and is ideal for an open-office environment if you want to shut out noisy co-workers. And it also played well outside -- in the streets of New York in my case -- though it will make your ears steamy on warmer days.

The control buttons, including a ring for adjusting volume levels, are on the left earcup, along with a button that you can switch on to activate an open microphone mode that allows ambient noise into the headphone and lets you hear your surroundings better.

As you might expect from a Plantronics product, the headphone is designed to receive calls. It works very well as headset, with a sidetone feature that lets you hear your voice in the headphone as you talk. There's also a mute button on the right earcup that allows you to mute your voice, which comes in handy when you're on a conference call and don't want other people on the line to hear your kid crying in the background.

Battery life for music playback is rated at a healthy 24 hours at moderate volume levels. There's an included cable so you can use this as a wired headphone if need be, and it comes with a nice cloth carrying case. Plantronics also makes a special-edition model that costs \$50 more and includes a hard carrying case. That one also has NFC, so you can pair the headphone with "tap to pair" devices that support it.

So what do you get if you pay the extra dough for the [Bose QuietComfort 35](#) ^[6]? First, you'll get a lighter, more comfortable headphone. The 290-gram Plantronics is comfortable, just not as comfortable as the 236-gram Bose, and the QC35 is the more attractive looking headphone. Second, the noise canceling on the Bose is better. It's not a big difference -- the Plantronics' noise canceling is good -- but the Bose does a little better job muffling noise.

As for the sound, you're not losing much. Once again the QC35 is a notch better. Its bass is a little tighter, the midrange a little smoother and warmer, and there's a little more sparkle to the treble. The Bose sounds slightly cleaner and more natural, but the BackBeat Pro 2 isn't far behind. And it certainly sounds better than the original [BackBeat Pro](#) ^[10]. It's also right there with the Bose as far as headset performance goes.

The long and short of it is I'd rather have the QC35, but the BackBeat Pro 2 is the better value and an excellent alternative for those who don't want to spend \$350 to \$400 on full-size noise-canceling wireless headphones from Bose, Sony or Sennheiser.



Specs and features

- 35 percent smaller and 15 percent lighter than the previous generation model.
- New ear cups for better ergonomics and ear coverage, with a flexible ear cup mount.
- Smart sensors that automatically pause or resume your music as you remove or put on your headphones.
- Connects up to two devices at once and can easily switch between devices.
- Built-in dual microphones for phone calls.
- Foldable ear cups and protective sleeve for travel.
- Battery lasts for 24 hours of continuous listening and up to 21 days on standby.
- Hibernates for up to 6 months if it's left on by mistake.
- 3.5mm cable so you can use this as a wired headphone if your battery runs out.
- 100-meter (328-foot) range if you pair it with a Class 1 Bluetooth device.
- Bluetooth 4.0
- Price: \$200, £230 or AU\$250 (coming to Australia in mid-November).
- Special edition BackBeat Pro 2 SE with more premium finishes and a hard travel case will be available in graphite gray for \$250, £250 or AU\$350 (available in Australia in mid-November).

Language:
English

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