

Plantronics BackBeat PRO 2 SE Headphones: The Best Pair for the Money

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Gear Diary

I recently reviewed the Plantronics BackBeat PRO 2 headphones; now I've got their slightly more upscale brother, the Plantronics BackBeat PRO 2 SE, in hand. Everything I enjoyed about the BackBeat PRO 2 is present (do check out their review if you haven't already), but with the PRO 2 SE headphones, there is even more to love.

From the moment you open the package, it's pretty obvious that the extra \$50 they cost over the BackBeat PRO 2 is money well spent if you prefer a better carry case and a slightly more refined pair of headphones that include NFC pairing for Android devices. Included in the package are a microUSB to USB charging cable and a 3.5mm headphone cable.

Let's start with the travel case: it's a hard-sided molded zip case that will keep the BackBeat PRO 2 SE headphones safe when traveling.

Inside the travel case, there is a mesh pocket for your cables with the headphones lying folded flat on the other side. The case measures approximately 9" tall by 9" wide (at the bottom) by 2.75" thick; while it will protect your headphones from getting crushed or dinged, it is a little large. As long as you have room for it in your backpack or carry-on, you'll be able to bring along and enjoy the Plantronics BackBeat PRO 2 SE headphones on airplane or train trips.

While the design of the BackBeat PRO 2 SE is very similar to that of the BackBeat PRO 2, there are subtle styling differences that stand out.

Rather than being composed of deep chocolate-brown matte plastic with brown PU leather padding on the ear cups and headband, the SE are composed of a matte light gray plastic with PU leather padding on the ear cups and headband. The swiveling headband and ear cup contacts are matte gray, and there is a flash of shiny texturized silver circling each ear cup, breaking up all the different grays. The overall effect is beauty without brashness; these headphones are classy.

At 10.2 ounces, the Plantronics BackBeat PRO 2 SE headphones are light and comfortable enough to wear all day at your desk or to fall asleep while wearing when traveling. The bright silver fabric inner ear cups are plainly marked so you'll never have to guess which ear they go on.

The headband is plushly padded; since the headphones are so light, the headband feels more like it is just resting on your head rather than actually supporting any headphone weight.

There are a lot of controls and features to cover, so let's get started with the left ear cup.

The middle of the ear cup contains your media controls: the center is a play/pause button, with forward and reverse on either side. The textured gray ring around the center is your volume wheel; pushing it forward while the headphones are on our ear will raise the volume, and pulling it down will lower the volume. It's all very intuitive.

On the backside of the ear cup, there is a three position switch; when pushed all the way to the top, "open mic on" allows for open-listening, allowing you to hear people talking to you or announcements in the terminal. The middle position is "open mic off" which allows for regular listening, and the bottom position turns on the active noise canceling.

Because the Plantronics BackBeat PRO 2 SE are over the ear headphones, there is some passive noise canceling afforded just by virtue of wearing them over your ears. The open mic setting actually amplifies the sound around you through the headphones; you can adjust how much the outside sound is amplified by moving the volume wheel forward or back while in that mode. When you turn the open mic setting off, you'll enjoy excellent sound with the passive noise cancellation of the over-ear cups, but you can still hear voices and other sounds through the headphones, albeit a bit muffled. When ANC is turned on, external sounds are highly muffled — you might know that someone is speaking, but you won't be able to really hear what's being said. Rumbling background noises are muted, which is great when you are on a plane.

You never have to wonder which setting you are on because as you switch between them, a woman's voice will alert you.

The entire center of the right ear cup functions as a button to answer or end phone calls; if you double-tap it, it will call the last person dialed. Directly under that, there are five blue LEDs that indicate charging status; they will blink as the

headphones are charging (this can take up to 3 hours), and they will turn off once charging is complete.

There is a sliding power/Bluetooth button; when you turn the headphones on for the first time, they will actively look for a device to pair with. When you are ready to add a second device, you just slide and hold the power button towards the Bluetooth icon until the LEDs flash red and blue for pairing; you can pair up to two devices, and it is very easy to switch between devices while using the headphones.

The red button is for muting calls during a conversation. On the bottom of the ear cup, there is a microUSB charging port and a 3.5mm headphone jack so you can continue listening after the battery dies, assuming you have a device with a headphone jack. The beauty of these headphones, something I can't emphasize highly enough, is that they can provide up to 24 hours of wireless music in between charges; this should handle even the longest overseas flights.

One of the many things I love about the BackBeat PRO 2 headphone design is that it has built-in smart sensors, so the headphones will pause your music when you remove the headphones, and the music will start again as soon as the headphones are back on your head. Because they lay flat, if you remove the headphones and wear them around your neck, you can fold the cups to comfortably lay against your collarbone.

The other thing worth celebrating is the amazing range these headphones have — up to 100 meters or 333 feet — depending upon whether you're going through a lot of walls or not. When wearing these headphones in the house, you can roam around through all of your rooms (or on the porch) without feeling tethered to your streaming music source or phone.

The Plantronics BackBeat PRO 2 SE headphones have 40mm drivers which produce immersive, high-resolution sound; as I've noted before, the music played through the BackBeat PRO 2 line is rich and pure — the bass is strong without being overwhelming, high notes are clear and lovely, midrange is not muddy at all — it's all very natural. I used some of my standard testing songs to see how the headphones performed, and it was no surprise that they did well. Radiohead's *Burn the Witch* can sound like a muddy mid-range mess on many speakers or headphones, but Thom York's voice is clear and strong against the instruments in the background; Beck's *Wow* has a booming bass line that can bottom out on speakers that aren't able to handle it, but the BackBeat PRO 2 SE headphones never stumble. Mutemath's *Used To* is richly symphonic and you'll feel like you are in the middle of the maelstrom. Whether you are listening to rap, audiobooks, pop, classical music, or EDM, the headphones sound phenomenal.

I mentioned earlier in this review that the Plantronics BackBeat PRO 2 SE headphones have NFC, which is commonly found on Android phones. This is yet another way to wirelessly connect, but since the headphone's Bluetooth is so long-range and sounds so good, I didn't really need it.

If you like having an app to use with your headphones, then you'll want to download the Plantronics Hub app from either the Apple App Store or Google Play (there's also a desktop version); the app allows you to get help if you need it, learn more about your headphone's buttons and settings, and find your headphones when they've been misplaced. If you use the desktop version, you can change the language spoken on the headphones and receive firmware updates. The app is handy, but it is not necessary to get a great user experience.

There are so many headphones available in the \$200 – \$500 space, and it is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that you'll get more if you spend more; the Plantronics BackBeat PRO 2 SE headphones prove that simply isn't true. If you want a good-looking pair of light and comfortable headphones that have long battery life, excellent active noise cancellation, an extended wireless range, and exceptional sound, look no further.

The Plantronics BackBeat PRO SE headphones retail for \$249.99, and they are available directly from the manufacturer or from Amazon [affiliate link].

Source: Manufacturer supplied review sample

What I Like: Fold flat for travel and storage; Active Noise Cancelling; Extended wireless range; All controls are easy to understand and easy to operate from the ear cups; Up to 24 hours playback via Bluetooth; Music pauses or resumes when you remove or put on headphones; Open Listening mode allows you to hear what's going on around you without removing the headphones; Connect up to two devices for easy switching back and forth between sources NFC; Classy gray; Very light and comfortable — perfect for wearing all day or traveling

What Needs Improvement: Nothing — the Plantronics BackBeat PRO 2 SE headphones work as promised, and they sound phenomenal

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