

Plantronics BackBeat 500 review: Affordable price, high-end sound

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Plantronics has long been known for their headsets used in business and call centers. I myself worked for many years at a call center and happily wore their headsets on a daily basis. They were always comfortable and the calls were always clear. The BackBeat 500 has me thinking music, not business. Read on for the full review of the Plantronics BackBeat 500.

SPECIFICATIONS

The Plantronics BackBeat 500 has the following features and specifications:

- Up to 18 hours listening and talk time on a single charge
- Operating range 33 feet
- 40 mm drivers
- Wideband enabled mic
- Siri, Google Now or Cortana compatible
- On-ear controls
- Multipoint Bluetooth
- Power Conservation DeepSleep mode
- 3.5 mm jack

WHAT'S IN THE BOX

- BackBeat 500 headphones
- 3.5 mm headphones jack
- Charging cable

DESIGN

The BackBeat 500 come simply packaged, nothing fancy, just a box. The set that I reviewed were dark gray, but they are also available in white or gray. They have a few angles on the headband that bring the F-117 stealth attack aircraft to mind. The cans are simple circles that fit over your ears and won't cause a stir because of their styling. A large R and L printed inside the headphones differentiate the right and left earcup.

This makes it very easy to put them on properly. The overall styling might be a bit bland, but it's not unattractive. One problem I had with the styling is a large, orange tag with PLT on it that is attached the headband. This looks very tacky and is totally unnecessary considering that the Plantronics branding is already located on 4 other parts of the headphones. Another issue I ran into was with the way the BackBeat 500 fit. The overall shape of the headphones is very round and the earcups don't articulate very much.

This results in a fit that leaves the earcups sitting on the ear at an angle instead of flat against the ear as you would expect. It doesn't really have too much of an effect on the sound, but you do end up with more pressure on the bottom of your ear.

EASE OF USE

Setting up the BackBeat 500 is very easy and very typical of most Bluetooth devices these days, no problem at all. Once you hit the power switch, the headphones announce that they are on and give a vocal cue as to the charge level of the battery. I found this battery charge level announcement very helpful, if it was high, I took the headphones and off I went. If it were low, I would just turn them off and plug them in to charge. There's no more being caught out with a low battery on your headphones.

The controls for the headphones are mounted on the headphones themselves. Pause, play, forward, reverse, volume up/down, 3.5 mm jack, mic and the charging port are located on the left earcup. The right earcup houses the on/off/pairing button and the phone control button. Once you've memorized where all the buttons are, controlling the headphones is no problem.

SOUND

The sound of the BackBeat 500 is very good. It's very well balanced with just a bit more bass than treble. If you like bass, you'll love these headphones. There was no hissing or distortion unless you turn the volume all the way up. The bass was very solid and clear, no muddy bass line with the BackBeat 500. The 40 mm drivers and advanced acoustic technology that Plantronics incorporated really do a good job of delivering a very nice sound. The only problem I found with the sound is that ambient sounds could be heard unless you had the volume over 50%. If you are sitting in a quiet room this isn't a problem, but in a public space, the ambient sound could be an issue.

RECEPTION/CALL QUALITY

Plantronics advertises the operating range of the BackBeat 500 as 33 Feet. I was able to get 42 feet away from the source before the signal started to drop.

Considering that Plantronics is best known for headphones and headsets used to communicate, you would expect the BackBeat 500 to be especially good at making and taking phone calls. And you would be right. These headphones really do live up to those expectations. The sound quality on both ends of a call is very good, making the BackBeat 500 great for talking on the phone.

BATTERY LIFE

With a claimed talk and listening time of 18 hours, the BackBeat 500 must have some amazing batteries. I ran the battery test with a full charge, volume set at 50% and the headphones 2 feet from the source at all times. I was able to get 18 hours and 41 minutes out of the headphones before the battery died. Of course, your results could vary depending on the volume and distance from the source.

The BackBeat 500 also incorporates a technology that Plantronics calls DeepSleep hibernation. This is said to help maintain battery charge for up to six months when the headphones are out of range or left on. I did not perform a test on this since I have had the headphones for less than six months.

PRICE/VALUE

The BackBeat 500 wireless headphones are listed at \$79.99USD. Considering the quality of the sound while listening to music and talking on the phone, I would have to say that is a great deal.

WRAP UP

Plantronics may be best known for their communication headsets, but if the BackBeat 500 wireless headphones are any indication of the direction they are headed, then it's time to start paying attention to their whole line of headphones. Sure the styling isn't cutting edge, but considering the great sound and awesome price of these headphones, I'm sure many people won't even care about the looks.

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