

Plantronics Rig 500 HX Stereo Headset Review

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Xbox Addict

When you hear the name Plantronics, one associates them with business headsets, such as those used for telemarketers or those that use them for customer service over the phone. Over the past couple of years though they have been aggressively entering the world of gaming, both on PC and on console. I've had the chance to try some of their headsets in the past, and with each one they release it's evident that they continue to use their strengths to put out good products. Over the past week or so I have had the chance to put their latest Xbox One headset, the Plantronics RIG 500HX Stereo Headset, through its' paces. From gaming, to music, to a movie or two, this headset's performance warrants a close look.

On a side note, please be aware that this headset is designed for Xbox One controllers with the 3.5mm microphone plug built in, and there is no Chat Adapter in the box. So if you are considering buying this headset and you have the older controller that requires the Chat Adapter you'll need to already have one or go out and buy one if you plan to use the RIG 500HX.

Having reviewed many other brands of headsets in the past, I was somewhat taken by surprise when I unboxed the RIG 500HX and discovered that I had to put it together. The headset is a modular design, so many of the parts are swappable. In terms of what you have to put together, you'll need to clip on the earcups to the main frame, as well as clip in the self-adjusting headband. Lastly you'll attach the removable noise cancelling microphone. It's a simple process and only took a few minutes. I have to say that the headset looks pretty slick, as it has a bit of a minimalistic look. The unit I reviewed is a grey camouflage and to tell you the truth the camouflage looks pretty good. All in all, I think most people will like the way the 500HX looks, but how does it feel?



One of the major highlights of this headset is how light it is. At 200 grams (7 oz.) this is undoubtedly one of the lightest headsets I have ever used for my Xbox One gaming needs. It is so light that I rarely gave it thought that I was wearing it. As for the earcups, they are cloth covered foam, and they add to the comfort as they didn't feel like they were overpressuring my head while still allowing a somewhat enclosed feel. As an added note, I wear glasses and even after long hours of gaming the 500HX didn't become uncomfortable at any time. This is important and many people out there do wear glasses, and to be able to wear a headset for extended periods of time comfortably with a pair of specs on is a bonus.

Something that is strange, and due to the modular design of the 500HX, is how you adjust the earcups for your head. Most headsets have a band, or some other support, that extends/retracts allowing you to adjust the earcups placement. The 500HX on the other hand has three slots on each side of the main frame where you 'click' the earcups into place. With this in mind, you only have three choices in terms of adjusting the size and area of where your earcups will go. For most this won't be an issue. I admit that I have a "large melon" of a head, but I am able to put the earcups into the middle or last slot without any issues, but I know there will be those people out there that may not be able to find that sweet spot and the three slots may not be enough in terms of adjustment flexibility; however, I also believe that the self-adjusting headband will help, as once you have your earcups in the slot you want, the headband can help with the final bit of adjustment for comfort.

As with any headphone, they can look and feel great, but if they don't sound good, then why bother. Well, the RIG 500HX sound pretty good. First things first, they are a stereo headset so they are two channel, but in the world of headsets, good two channel can sound better than crappy simulated surround sound. The earcup also don't totally isolate outside sound, but I didn't mind that as I like to know what is going on around me. I played many of the regular games that I am hooked on, such as Destiny, Forza Motorsports 6, and the recently released The Division. As I had hoped, they all sounded solid. From the engrossing soundtrack of Destiny, the wheel to wheel racing of Forza 6, to the newly realized New York in The Division that has been hit by an unknown flu-like pandemic, the RIG 500HX performed well. In terms of the latter, a game that I am most into lately, gunfire sounded good, and you could hear the muffled sound of other gun battles in the distance. The stereo headset was also able to provide basic directionality (left to right) and I noted this when racing in Forza 6 when cars were on various sites of my own virtual ride. Character voices in Destiny and The Division (e.g. NPC's) were also audible and very clear. If I had one minor complaint, it was when I was playing The Division and the sound got 'bass heavy', such as those times when numerous explosions were happening all at once. I noted some slight distortion, almost like too much was going on at a time. This was far and few between, but when it happened I did notice it.

In regards how I sounded to others, the friends that I played with online commented on how clear and how loud I sounded. The microphone was very good at picking up my voice and allowing my friends to hear it on their end. Muting my voice was as simple as putting the microphone in an up position and it was automatically turned off.

One big complaint I have with any of the newer headphones that have been designed with the 3.5mm headphone jack on the Xbox One controller in mind is that any volume control such as gameplay sound, gamechat sound, and mixing the two, is handled through the Xbox One dashboard. It can be a pain to do this, especially during a game. To solve this, I plugged in my Chat Adapter and then the Rig 500HX into once this was done my online friends immediately said that I was quieter and much softer sounding, almost muffled. It was strange, as the Chat Adapter affected one of the headphones strengths, voice quality. I don't know why this happened as it was quite strange and definitely noteworthy.

I also played a bit with Groove Music on the Xbox One, to check out the music sound. Although it was solid, it was nothing particularly special as it managed to provide a good enough sound for me to appreciate what I was listening too, from electronica, to some top 40 to some good old rock n' roll.

Given that Plantronics notes that these headphones can also be used on portable gaming devices (e.g. 3DS or PS Vita) or a mobile device, I did try these out in these areas too. I recently picked up Hyrule Warriors Legends for my New 3DS and thought it would be good to try the Rig 500HX with it. I have to say I was pleasantly surprised. The sounds of the characters as they attacked were very clear and the special attacks had a bit of directionality to them. I even watched a voiced over cutscene and it too sounded good. I think I may use these headphones with my 3DS when not playing on my Xbox One. After my 3DS time with them I plugged them into my Samsung Galaxy Android tablet and watched both Legend (Tom Hardy) and This is the End, both on Google Play. Given that these movies are pretty dialog heavy, I wondered how they would sound, and I have to say that the Rig 500HX managed to do the job here too.

One of the things I need to also mention is how indestructible they are. I was speaking with the PR rep and she told me to literally twist and bend the main frame, so I did. Much to my amazement I found that I couldn't break them. It is a kind of neat thing in such that if you have kids that are rough with gaming accessories you can feel good knowing that they won't break them that easy, if at all.

So, what do we think of the Plantronics RIG 500HX Stereo Headset overall? Well, they are definitely a budget headset that is worth considering. They are relatively cheap (\$69.99 USD), they are incredibly light, quite comfortable, very tough to break, and they sound pretty good for the price. You can't go wrong when looking for a secondary headset for your Xbox One gaming needs, or a new one for you or any member of your family knowing that it won't break the bank so to speak.

OVERALL SCORE: 80

Language:

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