



Bowers & Wilkins P7 Wireless

I still tend to think of Bowers & Wilkins as a loudspeaker company – and it is. But these days, the British firm is equally known for its trend-setting Zeppelin one-box music systems and its P-Series range of headphones.

I've owned a pair of compact P3 headphones since they were released some years ago. They're not the fancy wireless models that are now on offer, but they combine a compact, fold-up form factor with a hearty sound that makes music on the move a pleasure.

Colleague Justin Beachcroft-Shaw typically reviews the headphones that come our way, so I only have a fleeting impression of the original, wired P7 headphones, gained during a brief listen before the test pair was returned, back in mid-2014.

Even so, I broadly concurred with Justin's findings: he described the sound of the P7 as big and generous, slightly biased towards a generous bottom end, but still lucid and accessible in the trebles.

Three years later, it's my turn to spend some time with the P7, albeit the latest, wireless version. And not surprisingly, it's very much a case of more of the same, but with the added convenience of wireless operation.

The P7 Wireless looks and feels identical to the standard version, although it's slightly heavier (35 g, to be exact) than the wired version – the result of incorporating the Bluetooth hardware to make wireless operation possible.

Those familiar with the P7 will therefore recognise the generous, rectangular-shaped earcups with their thick, luxuriously padded sheepskin leather cushioning. These are suspended from the equally plushly padded and leather-clad headband via intricate, curved and chromed solid metal supports.

The supports can be extended to allow for different head sizes, and offer a measure of swivel, again to ensure a snug fit, regardless of head size or shape. They also allow the earcups to be folded for a more compact form factor when not in use.

A padded leather carrying case with quilted, stitched detailing provides a smart

home for the P7 Wireless when on the move.

The most obvious difference between the standard P7 and the wireless model are the controls on the right ear cup. These include a sliding on/off switch that also doubles as a Bluetooth pairing control, volume up/down buttons that also perform track forward/reverse functions, and a

play/pause button that can also be used to accept or reject incoming calls if the P7 Wireless is paired with a mobile phone.

A micro-USB socket is used to charge the P7's integrated battery. It takes up to three hours to fully charge the battery from empty, while the claimed average playback time is an impressive 17 hours.





The P7 Wireless can also be used in passive mode by connecting the universal cable supplied to the socket in the left earcup. The pads are held in place by strong magnets, but are easily removed to reveal the cable socket.

Doing so also exposes the smartly finished aluminium grille protecting the new, 40 mm nylon-damped drive units.

Pairing the P7 Wireless to my Astell & Kern Jr digital audio player was quick and easy. Both use the high-quality aptX codec, which ensures vice-free, sonically superior signal transfer, even in the case of high-res music files.

The P7s are circumaural headphones, which means they demand a snug fit, which was easily achieved, although I felt that the lateral pressure was a little too tight. This may well become less obtrusive with frequent use as the headphone settles in.

Sonically, the P7 Wireless is simply marvellous. These are truly full-range headphones, with a sound that is tonally rich, but never at the expense of lucidity or dynamic agility. The bass was bold and sonorous, with loads of thrust and authority.

There was a pleasant smoothness and even lushness to the midrange, although it wasn't allowed to mask texture or detail, while the trebles were clear and accessible, allowing an unrestricted view of the music's finer details.

However, what I enjoyed most about the P7s was their ability to create an uncanny sense of air and dimension. All too often, headphones can sound restricted, as if the music is being held captive inside your head. Despite their closed-back design, the P7s allowed the music ample spatial scope, so that the scale and stature of the music remained intact.

This was particularly apparent while listening to the Boston Symphony Orchestra's rendition of Beethoven's *Symphony No. 6* under the baton of Charles Munch (RCA Living Stereo 88/24 FLAC): the music was presented with stature and majesty, while the imaging was cohesive and dimensionally believable.

The exuberant strings were allowed to soar unbridled, while it was easy to pick out individual instruments – clarinets,

bassoons, flutes – without compromising the integrity and flow of the overall performance. The music was presented with both energy and delicacy, while reflecting a wholesomeness and almost tactile splendour that was as utterly absorbing.

On Paul Weller's 'In The Car', from *Saturn's Pattern* (Warner 44/16 WAV), the close-miked immediacy of the kick drum and the acoustic guitars in the intro was accurately juxtaposed against the almost ethereal, liquid piano, while the fuzz-edged electric guitar, the science fiction effects and the deep, vibrant bass that follow were rendered with an urgent intensity.

Again, I enjoyed the way the P7s created a seamless, open and accessible soundstage on which the music was given ample scope. There was no shortage of energy, and the headphones effortlessly tracked the music's dynamic extremes.

This ability to reflect both the impact and the intricacies of the music, regardless of genre, made the P7s a pleasure to listen to. These are headphones that can boogie with the best of them, but always retain a sophisticated sheen borne of their ability to unravel the finer threads of detail.

The Bowers & Wilkins P7 Wireless is a classy and sonically adept companion that elevates music on the move to a new level of enjoyment. It's earned a permanent place in my laptop bag!

Deon Schoeman

VITAL STATS

Type..... Circumaural, wireless
Transducer typeDynamic, closed
Drivers..... 40 mm damped nylon cone
ConnectivityBluetooth v4.1
Codecs..... aptX, AAC, SBC
Impedance.....22 ohms
Frequency response.... 10 Hz – 20 kHz
Sensitivity 111 dB/V at 1 kHz
Connections ..3,5 mm stereo input jack
 Micro USB 2.0
 (for charging and firmware)
Microphones.....2x with SVC2
 algorithm support
Mass..... 325 g (without cable)

Verdict

All the class, authority and musical vitality of the standard P7, plus the convenience and versatility of a fully wireless design. Cable connection retained as an alternative.

Price R6 890

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OUR RATING: 86/100

