



Audio Technica ATH-W1000Z Maestoso

Audio Technica produces an extensive range of headphones, with value and performance a common theme throughout. But the ATH-W1000Zs are something special – both in terms of their physical execution, and as far as their sonic performance is concerned.

Unashamedly targeting the audiophile segment, where price is less of a consideration than outright performance, the most obvious hallmark of the Maestoso 'phones are the solid teak earcups. And yes, you'd expect those earcups to impart a warm, woody character to the sound of the Maestosos – but we'll get to that part later.

The wooden earcups apart, the ATs feature 53 mm transducers with a two-part magnet array designed to boost magnetic flux density in the interests of improved efficiency. The voice coils employ bobbin-wound 6N oxygen-free copper.

The drive units are mounted in low-mass, rigid magnesium frames and baffles, separating them from the wooden earcups to address potential resonance while boosting accuracy.

The headband is an ingenious design which AT refers to as a '3D wing structure'. It links the soft, padded headband to an arched support system, which has the effect of reducing the pressure on the wearer's head, while optimising fit. It

works a treat, too.

Even the cable is special – it's a generous 3 metres long, and uses four cores of 6N oxygen-free copper, terminated by a gold-plated 6.3 mm jack plug with a wooden sleeve to match that of the earcups.

Okay, so the entire package oozes a certain upmarket class, which in turn creates high expectations on the performance front. I used the Maestosos with my current ADL Stratos reference headphone amp/DAC, as well as with the only slightly more modest ADL Esprit at the office.

Source material was provided from a Synology NAS via my 13-inch MacBook Pro running Audirvana 1.12.5 and JRiver



Media Center 21, as well as Tidal Hi-Fi and Deezer Premium.

Initial impressions were of a clear, succinct delivery that closely examined the music and all its elements. Finely focused imaging and generous staging allowed the music to expand beyond the boundaries of the earcups, immersing the listener in the music and creating an impression of experiencing as much as listening to the music.

Given the expectation created by those teak earcups that the Maestoso would sound warm, rich and almost organic, I was surprised that the trebles were so clean. That trait did mean that the headphones would expose any flaws in the signal chain, or the recording itself.

You would have to weigh that up against the AT's exceptional resolution, allowing even the finest of details and nuances to be exposed.

But before you get the wrong idea about the Maestoso's tonal signature, those lucid, sometimes brazen trebles were accompanied by smooth, even creamy mids and a wholesome, impactful bottom end. The bass response was certainly ample, adding substance and weight to the overall delivery.

Indeed, the ATs never sounded thin or uncompromising, and they served up their sonic wares with loads of momentum and gusto. As the 43 ohm impedance and 101 dB sensitivity on the spec sheet infer, they were easy to drive, too – even my Astell & Kern AK Jnr was more than capable of unleashing their full impact.

Listening to Melody Gardot's 'Don't Talk' off her *Currency Of Man* (Universal 44,16 WAV) set, the Maestoso produced a big, expansive sound that allowed the strings to live and breathe, while also doing full justice to the recording's rich harvest of detail.

Even subtle elements – an intake of breath here, a muttered whisper there – were precisely captured and perfectly rendered. The sound had substance and an almost tactile appeal, with Gardot's vocals clearly, boldly projected.

The accompanying guitar was liquid, and the Hammond organ almost organic.



Granted, there was a slight fizz to the trebles, an effervescence that aided resolution, but could become obtrusive during extended listening.

When it came to classical recordings, and symphonic works in particular, the Maestoso really came into its own. Carl Böhm's insightful reading of Mozart's *Symphony No. 35* conducting the Berlin Philharmonic (DG 96/24 FLAC) was believably delivered on a wide, expansive soundstage that allowed full enjoyment of even the most intricate, subtle details.

So open, so accessible was the sound that it allowed the Maestoso to lead listeners by the hand and gently, satisfyingly introduce them to every corner, every detail of the music.

However, while the sound was immersive and seamless, the delivery was not totally transparent, and again, the upper trebles seemed to carry more sheen than necessary.

Even so, the majesty of the music was convincingly reflected, thanks to the ability of the ATs to create sweeping sonic vistas, and the satisfyingly solid bass response, delivered with ample authority.

Headphone choice remains a more personal process than most, even in the inherently subjective context of the hi-fi world. Comfort and the right fit are important, and in fact fit has an influence on perceived sound quality, while sonic preferences are brought into sharper relief.

The Audio Technica ATH-W1000Z Maestoso is beautifully crafted and exceptionally comfortable, while delivering a sound that's generous, three-dimensional, impactful and

engaging. Depending on source signal and ancillaries, the upper trebles may sound a little too clean for some ears, while others will enjoy the fine resolution and close attention to detail.

Deon Schoeman

VITAL STATS

Type.....Closed-back, circumaural
Transducer type Dynamic
Drivers..... 53 mm transducer
Impedance43 ohms
Frequency response 5 Hz – 42 kHz
Efficiency 101 dB/1 mW
Max input power2 000 mW
Mass..... 320 g

Verdict

Clarity coupled to a powerful bottom end is the focus point of these attractively crafted closed-back headphones. They deserve a top-class headphone amp.

Price R17 099

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OUR RATING: 86/100

