



"I'm part dolphin!"

John Lydon in our Flashback interview

8-track cartridge, anyone?

We revisit some fun past pages to celebrate our 500th issue!



Hi-Fi Choice

PASSION FOR SOUND

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ISSUE 500

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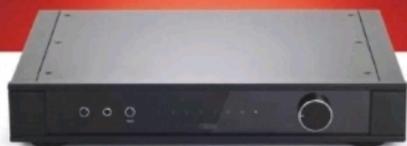
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THE SPHERE FACTOR



Elipson's BS50 Tribute retro-style floorstander

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Open all hours

Grado's take on a wireless headphone is different from the norm, but **Ed Selley** reckons it might be just what you need

Generally speaking, the aim of wireless headphones is to keep the distracting noise of the outside world shut out – key to which is having a closed-back design. So Grado's decision to go its own way and take the open-back route is an interesting one. Of course, one of the upsides of letting some of the noise of the outside world in is that there's no value in fitting noise-cancelling software – all of which means it comes in at a more reasonable price.

What you do get is a pair of 44mm, 4th-generation dynamic drivers that focus on reducing mass while increasing stiffness. This is combined with Bluetooth 5.2 with aptX HD and AAC codecs available. Immediately worthy of note is that the claimed battery life is 46 hours. As there is less processing and noise cancelling hardware to power, it's very efficient.

It's also comfortable and usefully practical too. The build quality is respectable, although the GW100x doesn't feel as ornate as some more

expensive rivals. The choice of USB-C for charging and the presence of a separate 3.5mm connection for wired use ensures it is simple to live with. This being Grado, there is no supplied carry case, but the headphone folds flat making it simple enough to stow.

Sound quality

Arguably, for those that are looking for a wireless headphone to shut the outside world out, the GW100x will be as much use as a handbrake on a rowing boat. Though it's not as avowedly open back as some of the company's more conventional passive models, it still leaks far too much noise to be usable in a public space. Use outdoors in quiet spaces is perfectly possible, however.

If you don't need to block out large amounts of outside noise, though, the Grado roars back into contention because the performance it offers is seriously impressive. Listening to the delicate *Over Tage* by Svanenborg Kardyb, the Grado leverages the nature of how it is built and the lack

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Grado GW100x

ORIGIN
USA/China

TYPE
Open back, over-ear wireless and wired headphone

FEATURES
• 44mm dynamic drivers
• Bluetooth 5.2; SBC; AAC; aptX HD
• Battery life: up to 46 hours

DISTRIBUTOR
Armour Home Electronics

WEBSITE
gradolabs.com
armourhome.co.uk

of processing to make even some very talented rivals sound closed in and processed in comparison. The opening *Op* combines a top end that is well lit without being bright and enough bass extension to be wholly convincing when the percussion starts.

The treble refinement and decent bass extension, combined with the feeling of lightness and agility that the open-back design and light drivers possess, mean that the Grado is unashamedly good fun. It powers its way through *Stop Making Sense* by Talking Heads in a way that makes more expensive rivals sound leaden. It's usefully forgiving too, both with compressed material and less-than-brilliantly recorded tracks. The real party piece, however, is its ability to excel as a passive headphone. Connected to the recent *Group Test* winning iFi GO bar (HFC 494) DAC, the GW100x is able to reflect the change in character and the increased bandwidth that the converter offers. The effect is quite similar to the formidable T+A Solitaire T (HFC 499), but where that needs a dedicated direct mode to sound superb, the Grado simply has less processing that needs to be bypassed.

Conclusion

It probably goes without saying that the GW100x won't be for everyone. The key selling point of most wireless headphones is their ability to keep the outside world at bay in challenging public spaces like planes and trains. The Grado's open-back design is undoubtedly compromised in some of these environments, but if you simply need a wireless headphone for the convenience of strolling around without having a cable attached, it suddenly roars back into contention. The level of performance on offer here is bettered only by wireless models that cost considerably more, making this an absolute bargain that will win many people over ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★	LIKE: Superb active and passive performance; well made; comfortable
VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★	DISLIKE: It struggles in more noisy spaces
BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★	WE SAY: Used in its specific performance envelope, this is an absolute delight and something of a bargain
FEATURES ★★★★★	

OVERALL

