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Arctic Monkeys' fabulous innovations

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# Hi-Fi Choice

**PASSION FOR SOUND**

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**Grado's RS1x multi-wood over-ear headphones**

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# Cocobolo chorus

Grado expands its RS range with a headphone that offers some twists on its classic recipe. **Ed Selley** tests the results

**F**rom the outside looking in, Grado can seem like the very model of engineering consistency. Its strong retro theme does well to convince it has decided on a set of design parameters and stuck to them religiously. In reality, it continues to develop its designs and this is a significant change over what has gone before.

Key to this is a process that combines different woods to make use of their specific virtues. Each driver housing is a combination of Maple, Hemp and Cocobolo (a South American hardwood commonly used for musical instruments), arranged in layers. The Cocobolo section is the smallest and mounted right at the back of the housing.

These housings contain an all new 'X Series' driver that, at 50mm across, is relatively large. Grado is customarily secretive about its drivers, but has been more open than usual here. Apparently, the intention is to boost the magnetic circuit while reducing the overall mass, squeezing more

performance out of the same given volume in the process. The company goes on to say that these drivers have been 'de-stressed' but, as ever, gives little info on what that entails.

The RS1x is open-backed and, here the driver effectively operates in free space. This means noise leakage is significant and will disturb anyone else in close proximity. Despite the rather parsimonious foam padding on the housings, this is one of the more comfortable Grado offerings I can remember. However, the captive cable is too long for desktop use and too short to sit any distance from a system. Build quality is great, though, and the RS1x looks fantastic.

## Sound quality

Would-be purchasers should know that this is an exceptionally sensitive headphone. Tested with a Chord Electronics Mojo 2 and Poly (HFC 488/431), the RS1x barely requires the Mojo to switch out of low gain mode to achieve perfectly reasonable listening levels.

## DETAILS

**PRODUCT**  
Grado RS1x

**ORIGIN**  
USA

**TYPE**  
Over-ear, open-back headphone

**WEIGHT**  
400g  
(including cable)

**FEATURES**  
• 50mm dynamic X Drivers  
• Metal band with leather cover  
• Fixed cable with 6.35mm jack

**DISTRIBUTOR**  
Armour Home Electronics

**WEBSITE**  
grado.co.uk

Beyond ease of drive, it brings virtues I have previously only experienced in more expensive Grado models. It creates a presentation that is genuinely two drivers suspended in free space. The effect is astonishingly open and compelling. *Stag's Bellow* by Martha Tilston becomes a gloriously immersive experience, anchored around her superb vocals. Even with crossfeed or other processing applied, the RS1x is very good at pushing information in front of the listener and adding a 25 percent crossfeed that boosts this further.

This ephemeral airiness doesn't come at the expense of bass heft. The huge low notes at the beginning of Dead Can Dance's *Dionysus* have a subsonic quality that lends the track a supreme sense of scale. Grado's efforts at reducing the moving mass have also created a blisteringly agile performer. The manner in which the RS1x powers its way through The Music's *Take The Long Road And Walk* is effortlessly engaging as there's no overhang or sluggishness.

This edgy recording does show up a tendency to sound a little sharp and unforgiving when pushed with this sort of material, but this is otherwise a neutral but revealing design that won't hesitate to show you what is amiss with the mastering of something you know well. This can be managed with sensible equipment selection, but also means the performance with really high-quality mastering borders on the sublime.

## Conclusion

What results is still very much a Grado, but one that combines effortless space and three dimensionality with a newfound level of drive and attack, all encased in a more compact and comfortable design. The RS1x might look like more of the same, but the result is a startlingly capable home headphone that will win many new converts to the brand ●

## Hi-Fi Choice

### OUR VERDICT

#### SOUND QUALITY



**LIKE:** Immersive but exciting performance; good sensitivity

#### VALUE FOR MONEY



**DISLIKE:** Won't flatter poor sources and material; captive cable

#### BUILD QUALITY



**WESAY:** A seriously capable headphone that combines the existing Grado virtues with some new talents

#### EASE OF DRIVE



#### OVERALL

