

Sennheiser PXC 450

Noise-Cancelling Headphones



No tech-loving traveller these days would board an aeroplane without packing a pair of noise-cancelling headphones in a zip-up carry-case. Whether you're actually listening to music or just cancelling out the low-frequency drone of jet engines, noise cancellation works—and in the best headsets it works very well indeed.

I have heard several such models in the past, from Bose's iconic but expensive QuietComfort range through well-priced Jabras, all the way down to an outrageously low-priced pair from TDK. But the *meister* of all things headphonic is surely Sennheiser, so I've have been keen to get my ears under the company's NoiseGard-equipped top-of-the-range PXC 450s.

No, the PXC 450s are not cheap. Indeed a purchase will leave you with only a single silver echidna in change after you hand over eight Nellie Melbas, but they're certainly luxurious head-huggers, from the padded headband and circumaural earcups to the solid cabling and gold-plated pluggery. Externally,

they look like most other of Sennheiser's high-end models except for those controls on the right earcup, which comprise a circle of buttons to turn the NoiseGard circuitry on and off, a volume control and a handy central button labelled 'TalkThrough' which does exactly what its name implies: press it, and the music volume is automatically attenuated, and the microphone that was previously used for acquiring the noise for cancellation is roped into capturing the voice of whoever's speaking to you, which is then piped into the headphones, so the nice lady can ask if you'd prefer beef or chicken. Perhaps more importantly, the sound of your own voice is also captured by the microphone, so that when you reply that you'd previously ordered the vegetarian meal, you won't be shouting at the nice lady, which is what most people who are trying to talk while wearing headphones tend to do.

Inside the earpieces, the transducer layout is most unusual, with sloping gauze-covered panels angling the Duofol diaphragms

towards your ear canals, with all manner of angular areas within. Whatever all that is doing, it works. The noise cancellation is the best I've yet heard, dropping lower frequencies highly effectively (NoiseGard is most effective at frequencies below 1kHz), and the TalkThrough is an excellent addition and a genuinely useful feature that means you don't have to scramble around for a pause button, or remove the phones completely, which is what you have to do with any headphones not fitted with the circuit.

Sennheiser quotes a frequency response for the PXC 450s of 8Hz to 28kHz, which is certainly far more extended than you'll require for listening to music, though the impossibility of actually measuring the 'flatness' of the response across this range (which would vary from listener to listener, due to the naturally occurring differences in ear canals of the various users) this is more of a 'guide' than a specification that's writ in stone. More important, and far more easy to accurately quantify are the impedance, which is 150Ω in pas-

sive mode and 750Ω in active mode, and the SPL, which is 108dB. The combination of the low impedance and the high SPL means that the PXC 450s will be quite easy for your iPod (or whatever) headphone output to drive, so you won't be taxing your iPod's battery unduly. And speaking of batteries, Sennheiser says the single AAA inside the PXC 450 will last up to 16 hours, which means you may have to change batteries as you're flying over Dubai or thereabouts, but carrying a single spare AAA in your pocket isn't a big ask (though they will certainly ask as you're stepping through the airport scanner!).

Many headphones are now foldable, and these Sennheisers are no exceptions, indeed the PXC 450s can be folded up two different ways, the easiest and most obvious of which makes it possible to pack them completely flat into the supplied hard case, which then becomes a package that's about the same size of three stacked DVD cases. And if you're wondering why I wrote 'most obvious of which', that's because those of you skilled in the art of origami might have no problems folding these phones quickly, but if you're not, you might find yourself folding them the 'wrong' way first, before realising the correct method. But hey, it's not rocket science!

Putting 'em On

Sonically I was at first surprised to hear quite a forward balance, with the bass a little underplayed, although over a long listening session I settled in to enjoy the fine detail and spacious sound that I find are characteristic of the best Sennheiser headphones. A word to the wise, however, which is that the PXC 450s sound even better in their 'passive' mode—that is, with the noise cancelling turned off via an inaccessible switch on the left earpiece. In passive mode that slight leanness in the bass register disappears, and you're back to top-notch full-bodied Sennheiser sound: crystal clear, sparkling up top, banging down the

bottom. And in passive mode, there's the added advantage that you won't drain the single AAA battery in the right earpiece that powers the whole shebang.

'Sennheiser's noise-cancelling PXC 450 headphones push luxury and high performance to stratospheric levels'

Last, but far from least, the circumaural cups on the PXC 450s enable a very good seal around the ears, no doubt to achieve some level of passive noise cancellation in addition to the active noise cancellation. However, this works both ways (literally) and means that when you're wearing them, you can play your music quite loudly without annoying anyone who happens to be sitting close by, which could be particularly useful if you're enjoying a saucy lyric or two.

Conclusion

Sennheiser's PXC 450s are really two pairs of headphones in one—high-quality noise-cancellers for the frequent flyers and top-notch passive sound for homebodies. A double whammy! And for those of you who might be a tad intimidated by that RRP in the info panel, I need to mention that after reviewing these headphones for another magazine a few months ago, I was interested in getting a pair myself, so I hopped on the 'net to check out the 'street' prices and found that many Australian 'bricks and mortar' retailers were offering some pretty impressive discounts.

Jez Ford



Sennheiser PXC 450 Noise-Cancelling Headphones

Brand: Sennheiser
Model: PXC 450
Category: NC Headphones
RRP: \$799
Warranty: Two Years
Distributor: Syntec International Pty Ltd
Address: 60 Gibbes Street
 Chatswood
 NSW 2067
T: 1800 648 628
T: (02) 9910 6700
F: (02) 9910 6710
E: info@syntec.com.au
W: www.syntec.com.au



- Great Sennheiser sound
- NoiseGard works brilliantly
- Comfort



- Bypass switch location
- Best in passive mode
- RRP