

ADL

Hifipig.com (UK)
ADL H118 headphone review



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ADL (Furutech) H-118 Headphones

The audio industry is at the moment coming out of the most confused period of history. A few years ago I assumed that the next generation of human life would never ever know what hi-fidelity either meant or sounded like, as we all did away with our vinyl and CD and played highly compressed MP3s from our iPods and iPhones. Luckily, vinyl has made an unimagined revival, and the likes of FiiO, Astell and Kern, Sony, Cowon and iBasso amongst others, have put money into developing hi-def personal stereo Walkmans. At the same time, the thought of playing good quality audio on throwaway earphones has similarly died a death. Where just a few years ago I could count the number of good quality headphones on one hand, over the last few years has seen a plethora of new brands, new looks, and a new quality of sound. Where the Sennheiser HD650 was seen as the queen of quality, that massive £399 price tag is seen today as a starting point and when inflation has only been moving at a snail's pace. Today, we like to see wooden edged cans, something popularised many years ago by Grado or Audio Technica, or silver edged open-back beauties perhaps inspired by the Stax 007 with great extension in high frequencies but often lacking in the bass. Many others now fit anywhere around these boundaries, and all with a multitude of looks and designs whilst pertaining to be the market leader.



So, to be given a £225 headphone from a Japanese manufacturer famous for their beautiful looking plugs, conditioners and connectors, such as the Schuko, and who's ADL line first moved into the digital portable domain in 2011 with the GT40 USB DAC/phono stage and with some beautifully looking devices thereafter, the H118 was somewhat low-end in the looks department looks with its all-black leatherette design and tear-drop shape. However, the company's ADL (Alpha Design Labs) hi-end marque suggests that this is indeed a product worthy of praise if not quite as good looking as it's daddy the H128, with its brown and silver. However, I decided to give it a go. If the shape has been something of an afterthought (there are better looking Koss headphones from 40 years ago), the foldaway design, nonmagnetic rhodium-plated mini XLR connection allowing upgrade to better cables, and the classy zipped carry case to put it all in, show that actually this is a product that has been carefully thought through. I must stress,

therefore, that if you want something bling or OTT, then this is not the product for you. This is about sound quality, not about looks.

At first fitting I was actually impressed by just how comfortable the headphones are, bearing in mind they are closed back and on-ear, and having a fairly tight-fitting feel to them (4.5 N approximately) significantly cancelling background-noise. The product is exceptionally well made; it does not feel cheap and is fairly weighty at 245g without cable or 310g with. Being designed either with people with very small ears, or for those related to the late Dr Spock with his Vulcan shaped ears, these 3/4 size headphones lasted on my ears longer than I thought they would. The punchy bass in the 24/96kHz Brunette Models "Autarky" from my FiiO X5 gave of itself with passion, showing that the 40mm diameter high-flux "alpha cryo treated" magnet could work with ease, showing no sign of wanting. Even by today's norm of 50mm-plus diaphragms this was highly impressive not only in going down to 20Hz easily, but also in the speed of sound. These speakers are not slow, and the lightweight mechanics with coils made with copper-coated special aluminium alloy wire help to keep everything working at speed. The bass only showed a sign of being frustrated and distorting at very high level of listening, though with their excellent damping of outside noises high listening levels is unnecessary as well as obviously dangerous. The ring between the voice-coil and diaphragm is designed to keep ultra-high frequencies in phase, and indeed the sound is very much in control and musical between my ears, but I found those top frequencies to be rather anaemic for my liking. However, comparing this with my £500+ selection of cans was somewhat unfair, and whilst many cans can either sound too bright or the mid frequencies rather excessive, these cans gave a very fair and speedy rendition across all frequencies. J.S.Bach Largo from the Concerto in A-minor for four harpsichords and orchestra BWV 1065 (24bit/192kHz Saarländischer Rundfunk Kammerorchester, Karl Ristenpart) did not sound lacking in top frequencies, it was all there but just not 'sticking out'. I remember reading a review many years ago about the Quad ESL63 electrostatic loudspeaker where the reviewer said that the fact the top end sounded lacking was not that it wasn't there, but because we are used to listening to a soundstage where tops and bass are excessive rather than flat. I mean, did you ever play your mp3 files on your iPod in "flat", or did you (like me) prefer listening in "electronic" or "rock 'n' roll". Now that I listen only to wav or hi res PCM/DSD files, I really did want to be aware of the top frequencies



CONCLUSION

The H118 present very impressive bass for the price/size, and the mid-range was also stunning, particularly in vocals such as Patricia Barber "What a Shame". What a shame, though that the top end cymbal ripples on that same track weren't however just that tad more pronounced. Then I could have said these were the best headphones I had heard even up to £400. Certainly, if you are on the train or somewhere where it is noisy, then these are cans to go for. The IHP-35X upgraded cable at £75, with silver plated OCC copper does present a better top end sound and helps to

give a wider soundstage, and are a worthy upgrade.

Sound Quality – 8.3/10 (brilliant bass and midrange)

Value for Money – 8.4/10 (lots of accessories)

Build Quality – 8.55/10 (including case et al)

Overall – 8.4/10

Janine Elliot



<http://hifipig.com/adl-furutech-h-118-headphones/>
