

Grado's greatest

Grado's flagship cans might just make the best sounds you'll ever hear

PRODUCT Grado GS1000

TYPE Open-back headphones

PRICE £995

CONTACT 01279 501111 @ www.gradolabs.com

A grand for a pair of headphones? You can buy a pair for a tenner, and a good pair for just £100. Grado may have to do some justifying here.

Appearances are promising, though, with newly designed drivers and high-purity copper windings and leads. However, with Grado's typical reticence, it declines to give much technical detail. The company is known for no-nonsense products, many of which have a unprepossessing look about them, and while these are considerably smarter than the rest of the Grado range, the GS1000s are not above sharing some items, including the headband adjustment slide. So, has the extra money really delivered the goods sonically?

Headphones can impose on the listener's head and ears in a very physical way, and Grado's other models, with their 'supra-aural' foam pads that rest directly on the ears, are not everyone's idea of fun. The GS1000s, however, rest quite gently on a large area outside the ear itself, giving plenty of clearance for even protuberant ears. They do get a bit warm, though, and we found the lightly padded headband needs careful positioning on a balding head in order not to press uncomfortably. On the other hand – and despite Grado's own suggestion that there is a distinct sonic 'sweet spot' with regard to positioning – we found results are highly consistent and the headphones are very stable on the head.

SOUND QUALITY

Perhaps the most telling moment in a long auditioning period spent with these cans came when a passing professional musician raised both eyebrows on being told the price of a pair of GS1000s, only to nod and concede the point completely within about five seconds of hearing them. That really

sums up the achievement of these headphones: they can make the most seasoned of critical listeners realise sound reproduction can be *that* good. The GS1000s offer a level of musical revelation unmatched, in our experience, by almost any replay or, indeed, live performance.

Eh? Yes, we do go that far. Obviously that presupposes a good recording, but just as there are plenty of indifferent recordings around there are also indifferent live music venues where poor acoustics, ventilation noise, lighting buzz, noisy neighbours or a multitude of other incidental distractions get in the way. Grado can't compensate for the 'being there' chemistry of live music, but the level of detail and insight the GS1000s bring to the party considerably exceeds what we've heard in all but a few concerts.

In hi-fi terms, the tonal balance redefines the concept of neutral. Dynamics are so effortlessly wide that they take some getting used to: but they make most other cans and practically all speakers sound seriously congested. Imaging is precise and extended in a way that most reproducers only dream of. We've heard other hi-fi components that have pointed up new details in familiar recordings, but these quite literally make those discs sound completely new, such is the extra insight they convey.

All concerned with making recordings owe it to themselves and their audience to check their skills via these cans. Meanwhile, if you like headphones you'll love these to bits. And if you never got on with them, these could make you change your mind. They are that good. **HFC**

Richard Black



VERDICT

SOUND >> 97%



PRO

Detail, neutrality and musicality all exceed what we had previously thought possible. Admirably unfussy about partnering equipment.

COMFORT >> 85%



CON

Once heard, can induce lasting depression regarding almost every other hi-fi experience. Ear pads can make your ears feel warm after extended listening.

BUILD >> 90%



VALUE >> 95%



CONCLUSION

This may well be the finest electricity-to-sound transducer in the world. If you don't want to be haunted by the suspicion that your interest in audio is terminally superficial, you absolutely must hear a pair of these.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 96%