

Art attack

As flagship of the Art Monitor series, the ATH-A2000Z looks striking, **Ed Selley** gives it a listen to see if it matches expectations

The growth in popularity of headphones has mainly focussed on models that can be used on the move with smartphones and tablets – the ‘hybrid’ type design being particularly popular. Meanwhile those for home use have seen less attention. But for manufacturers that made headphones before the boom, it remains an important category. Audio-Technica is particularly active here and has recently updated its Art Monitor series. Let’s meet the range topper.

The ATH-A2000Z is built around a pair of 53mm dynamic drivers that use bobbin-wound voice coils and Permendur (a man-made cobalt/iron magnetic alloy) magnets. The drivers themselves use a magnesium baffle to ensure they are as stiff and light as possible and claim an impressive frequency response of 5Hz to 45kHz.

Unusually for a home model, each housing is closed back, making use of

There is a genuine sense of space and soundstage to proceedings

Audio-Technica’s ‘DADS’ (Double Air Damping System), which consists of two chambers. One contains the driver, which is in turn connected to the other to allow the air moved via the driver to be controlled and used to augment the low-end response. In practise, the ATH-A2000Z is barely any quieter than an open-back design and sound spills out.

The speaker housings themselves are made out of titanium, which helps keep the weight down to a reasonably low 294g. To denote its position over other models in the range, Audio-Technica has finished the outer casings in a brushed titanium finish which looks fairly smart although it is something of a fingerprint trap. The housings are well padded although the pads are not removable.

Where the ATH-A2000Z differs most significantly from rivals is in its use of

AT’s ‘3D Wing Support’ system. This uses a pair of independently sprung pads to provide the connection between headphone and head while mounting the earpads on a skeletal hoop system. I find it to be extremely comfortable, but others who have tried it on have been less convinced – as always, you’ll need to try this for yourself to decide. The build quality is good with everything feeling solid and well thought out. There is little in the way of supplied accessories, but it represents good value.

Sound quality

In use, the ATH-A2000Z reveals some traditional Audio-Technica calling cards, but also shows some new – and for the most part welcome – characteristics. Listening to *IV* by Black Mountain, there is a slight lift in the midrange which emphasises vocals and instruments like guitars. This feeds into a top end that is well lit, but manages to avoid sounding bright or brittle even when you run it

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Audio-Technica
ATH-A2000Z

ORIGIN
Japan

TYPE
Over-ear, closed-back
headphone

WEIGHT
294g

FEATURES
● 53mm hand-wound dynamic drivers
● Magnesium baffles in titanium enclosure

DISTRIBUTOR
Audio-Technica UK

TELEPHONE
0113 2771441

WEBSITE
eu.audio-technica.com

at very high levels. This means that the amount of detail and realism that the ATH-A2000Z can bring to vocals is deeply impressive. There is a real weight and texture and considering the design is notionally closed back, there is also a genuine sense of space and soundstage to proceedings. Even listening to something truly vast in scope like Underworld’s *And I Will Kiss*, the headphone does an impressive job of making sense of the material and reproducing it in a suitably convincing fashion.

Where the ATH-A2000Z improves on previous designs is in the bass response. The low end is powerful and shows an impressive level of control and definition. Combined with the lively but well judged top end, the result is a headphone that is consistently entertaining to listen to. Compared with rivals like Shure’s SRH1840 (*HFC* 388), the Audio-Technica lacks the same drive and immediacy but it is much more forgiving of poorer recordings.

The other aspect of the performance that may prove to be either a positive or a negative depending on your perspective is that the ATH-A2000Z isn’t especially affected or influenced by the connected equipment. Testing it with a Naim Supernait 2 integrated amp, Moon Neo 230HAD DAC/preamp (*HFC* 411) and Chord Mojo portable DAC/headphone amp (*HFC* 405) – all of which are rather different beasts – doesn’t significantly alter the way it sounds.

Conclusion

If you like the way that the ATH-A2000Z goes about its business, this is good news, but it is perhaps not the most transparent model available at the price. What it is, however, is a very capable and consistent sounding headphone that’s well built and comfortable for long-term listening sessions. All of which makes it a very capable new arrival at the price ●



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY
★★★★★

VALUE FOR MONEY
★★★★★

BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★

EASE OF DRIVE
★★★★★

OVERALL

★★★★★

LIKE: Detailed and refined presentation; comfortable; well built

DISLIKE: Slightly relaxed sound; not entirely transparent

WESAY: A capable and comfortable home headphone that is extremely easy to listen to at length