

WIRED

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Active Noise-Canceling Headphones Noble Peace Prizes

Back in the day, active noise canceling meant a quick roundhouse for the proud grandmother in the middle seat. Then came the Bose QuietComfort headphones, the first to cut the clamor by generating a sound wave opposite the ambient buzz. Bose still makes a sweet headset; we'd rate the QC2 at a more-than-solid 8 out of 10. But we recently tested four new models and found that Bose is no longer king of the ring. —JOE BROWN

Audio-Technica ATH-ANC7

Primarily a pro audio company, Audio-Technica wanted its entry into this arena to boast the best possible sound quality—with or without the noise canceling activated. Thank you, neurotic Japanese engineers. Thank you. **WIRED** Amazing sound, balanced and sweet, from Segovia to Snoopy Dogg. Lightweight and comfortable. Battery still kickin' after two weeks of nearly constant use. Oh yeah: excellent, clean noise canceling. **TIRED** The only new model without a monitor button. \$220, www.audio-technica.com



Sennheiser PXC 450

We almost couldn't get these phones because Sennheiser was still obsessing over the noise-cancellation data. Boy, did it pay off. **WIRED** Bombastic noise canceling. Oversize cups fit listeners from Dumbo on down. Monitor button useful for hearing the captain apologize for ineffective air-conditioning and impending doom. **TIRED** Uncomfortable earcups made me sorry that security had nabbed my box cutter. Pressure on the cans—as when snoozing against the window—summons terrifying feedback shriek. \$450, www.sennheiser.com



Philips SHN9500/37

Philips' product development team traversed the globe and took 86 molds of human ears from every inhabited continent. They created the ultimate average ear shape and made these headphones to fit it. **WIRED** Super comfy for long stretches. Blocks a surprising amount of noise just by virtue of their shape. Already a bargain at list, but we found 'em online for 95 bucks! **TIRED** Sounds muddy once you switch the power on. Overlarge case is a better tambourine than headphone holder. Noise canceling gets buzzy when battery is low. \$160, www.philipsusa.com



Sony MDR-NC60

When we first ogled these exquisitely crafted cans, we almost forgave Sony for pushing ATRAC3. When we put them on we were right back to bitching about Memory Sticks and UMDs. Like most of Sony's recent audio endeavors, these look far better than they perform. **WIRED** Oozes first-class, from the swank leather case to the smoked metal accents. Decent sound. **TIRED** Hissssssssssss. The only pair we tested that produces an audible hum when noise cancelation is switched on. There is just no excuse for this kind of behavior. \$200, www.sonystyle.com



PHOTOGRAPH BY Todd Tankersley

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