



TEST WINNER

MARK LEVINSON NO. 5909

Everyone comes out of this well, but the ML's edge it

It's fair to say that you are spoiled for choice when it comes to this new crop of premium wireless headphones. The quality on offer has truly been superb at this higher price level. Every single one of these headphones is fully deserving of their five stars. They combine stunning sound performance, exceptional build quality with luxurious and comfortable materials, seamless use with apps and active noise cancellation – all in a way that is fully befitting of the high price tags.

There's really no wrong answer here, and we are confident you will be happy with whichever headphones from this group test that you end up buying, that suits your taste and budget. Each pair rules the roost at its own price point.

But there are differences between the models: from the suite of features on offer, the Bluetooth codec support and battery life, to price and, most important of all, sound quality. And while 'more expensive' doesn't always

translate to 'better', we do find that the pricier models offer a step up in performance, every time.

The AirPods Max are obviously suited more to dedicated iOS users who enjoy being firmly embedded within Apple's ecosystem – you get extra features such as spatial audio into the mix, for instance – while Apple shows just how serious it is about sound quality with the headphones' crisp, engaging and grown-up performance.

A lifestyle choice

B&W's Px8 offer longer battery life, wider support with devices, and a sleek design that is the most 'lifestyle-looking' pair of the lot. They also offer a step up in clarity and insight, with a precision that is notably better than that of the AirPods Max – although they lose a bit of energy and sparkle when playing at lower volumes.

While we're not keen on those plasticky buttons amid the premium build quality on the Focal Bathys, the sound quality is fantastic. They offer a wider presentation than both the B&W and Apple models,

We have that rare thing here: top quality in all of the contenders



along with a richer, full-bodied tonal balance that's akin to their exquisite wired models. Along with a more expressive midrange, the more generous earpads also make the Bathys ideal for long-term listening.

We are not blind to the fact that the Mark Levinsons, our test winner, are a good £300-£400 pricier than the other three headphones on test here. If your budget can't stretch that far then the others will do you just fine. But if you want the best wireless performance from your headphones that ventures into *bona fide* hi-fi territory (and you have the budget to match your ambition) the No. 5909 are our firmest recommendation here.

The MLs offer a jump up in sound quality that more than justifies the near-£1000 price tag, and far outstrips the others. From the comfortable fit to the custom ANC levels in the app and higher-quality codecs, there is little to fault here. They truly are an exceptional pair of wireless headphones.