

Audio Media

April 2011

Headphones, I remember them. Like I remember MG Metros. Mobile phones with pull out aerials. Valve wirelesses. Ration books. Lord Kitchener's moustache. Okay, so I'm exaggerating a little bit. But it's been a long time since I gave any serious consideration to a pair of headphones. I use them often enough: I have a trusty pair of DT100s that follow me out on location and there's a sweet little pair of Beyer Galactics in our voice booth that punch well above their weight. But by and large, they're something I take for granted.

Now pardon me for a moment while I hang my head in shame because I've just tried, and fallen in love with, a pair of KRK KNS 8400s.

Even before you plug them in the impressions are all favourable. They even come with a neat drawstring bag made from neoprene and a little cleaning cloth. And although the bulk of the construction is plastic, it's of a very high quality. Think of the difference between the inside of a Skoda and VW. Technically they'll be virtually identical, but the thing that separates the two brands is the grade of materials used. The KRKs are at the Golf Gti end of the scale. The pads are covered in what KRK calls 'premium leatherette': which sounds rather more exotic than it actually is, and the connector on the end of the decent-length cable is a gold plated 3.5mm plug that comes with a screw-in adaptor to take it up to a quarter inch. There's also an in-line volume slider, which has a solid, quality feel to it. Also, being closed-back, the 8400s offer a decent amount of sound isolation: up to -30dba.

Missing Nothing

Now what do the KRKs actually sound like? The sound they produce is very neutral. All the frequencies in all the right places from way down low at 5Hz, right the way up to 23 kHz (way beyond my ageing ears). It's a very warm sound and incredibly easy to listen to for long periods, but also very natural. The first time I used them in anger was on a car recording session at a rolling road facility. Just about every aspect of the KRK's design would be put to the test, from audio isolation to sonic clarity. And they passed with flying colours. It was easy to lose myself in the recording and reassuring to know that when I passed the cans to the client (the audio director from a major games company), nothing was being lost.

I thought it only fair to try them on a piece of music I know well, so I dug out AC/DC's *Rock and Roll Ain't Noise Pollution*. Yeah, I realise what that says about me, but I've heard it played on all manner of hardware over the years and the KRKs are up among the very best. The detail in the sound, in Brian Johnson's vocals for example, is amazing. It really felt like I was hearing it in the studio.

Conclusion

The 8400s are a lovely pair of headphones and an incredibly easy listen, both from a comfort and a sonic point of view. After a very short while you forget you're wearing them and just bask in the great sound.

Headphones. The new rock and roll.

THE REVIEWER

JERRY IBBOTSON runs Media Mill a York-based ,audio production company started in 2000 that specialises in sound for video games. Prior to this, Jerry was a BBC journalist for ten years, ending his spell with the Beeb as a reporter and newsreader at Radio One Newsbeat.