

August 2014



Furutech ADL EH-008 Earphone Review

*One of the best headphone amps in the business just
got a new friend* by [Ed Selley](#)



Introduction

When a company introduces a product that takes them into a new category or segment, they can face a challenge in terms of explaining how this new arrival relates to their existing equipment. This can be more of an issue if the product is then largely or totally dependent on other company products to work at all. Sometimes this can mean that the real purpose and role of a product can wait some considerable time before its true relationship with the rest of the line-up becomes clearer and more defined.

Furutech is first and foremost, a cable manufacturer. In this case, the term 'manufacturer' is important because Furutech doesn't simply buy cable in from another company, make it a nice colour and sell it as their own. Their range is bespoke and unique to them. The arguments over how much of a difference that cabling makes to the final performance of a system will run and run but what is not up for debate is that once you've bought some of Furutech's range, you're unlikely to have to replace it down to wear and tear.

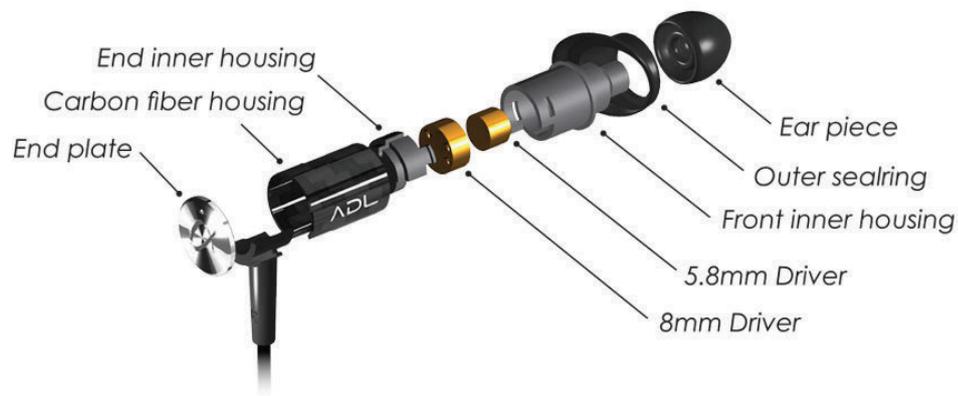
In recent years, Furutech has expanded into electronics. The Alpha Design Labs (ADL) sub brand has been well received and has included some very clever and unusual products. The GT40 phono stage and headphone amp that can also digitise the vinyl signal for archiving is a seriously clever product that fills a unique niche. It is joined by a range of headphone amps including the ADL Cruise that I reviewed last year. Until recently though, these clever and rather lovely headphone amps have had to rely on other company's products to strut their stuff. This has all changed with the arrival of the EH-008 earphone that takes Furutech into another new category. How does this latest offering stack up against the waves of competition and is it the partner the Cruise has been waiting for?

Design



The EH-008 is the only earphone in the current Furutech line-up and has a design that reflects a company that has never consistently chosen the most logical path trodden by other companies for their products. This means that the EH-008 pitches right into a price point dominated by designs built around a single balanced armature - and at £5 less than the EH-008, there are few finer examples of this than the Final Heaven IV. The Furutech however is a dynamic driver design. Since the Sennheiser IE800 redefined what I understand to be possible from dynamic drivers, I'm no longer making any performance differentiation between dynamics being the 'cheap' option and armatures the 'expensive' one. What *is* more unusual is the configuration of the EH-008.

Multiple armature earphones are far from unusual - the use of two or more is a common solution to the slightly limited bass response of the type. The EH-008 is the first earphone I've encountered that uses a pair of dynamic drivers however. There is no technical reason why a single dynamic driver in an earphone can't be used to generate a full bandwidth signal but there are equally compelling reasons why - like is the case in full size loudspeakers - using two drivers with a suitably designed crossover won't improve performance by reducing the amount of bandwidth that a single driver has to cover. To this end, Furutech has fitted the EH-008 with an 8mm and a 5.8mm driver. These are then mounted coaxially which has advantages and disadvantages. On the plus side, it means that the phase should be correct across both drivers and reduces the physical size of the housing. On the other hand it makes for a more complex mounting arrangement and increases the length of the chassis required to hold them.



In this case, Furutech seems to have handled the negatives commendably well. As it is considered poor form to break apart review products, I can't comment on the exact nature of the driver mounting but the EH-008 doesn't feel especially bulky. Compared to the extremely slender Final, it is a slightly thicker tube but the overall length is in keeping with a standard pair of in-ear earphones. The mass is increased slightly by the use of a moulded plastic mount where the cable meets the housing - which while sturdy enough lacks some of the ruggedness that the Final possesses due to the clever integration of the cable with the end 'bung.'

This is about the only negative that I can muster about the overall finish of the EH-008. The Furutech is otherwise one of the most beautifully finished earphones I have seen at any price and again has a boldness to the design that is encouraging in an increasingly crowded field. Whereas the Cruise headphone amp has to make do with a carbon fibre wrap, the EH-008 housings are a genuine carbon fibre shell that is finished at one end with a steel section that gives some styling familiarity with the Cruise's demagnetised end plates. The carbon section holds the rear mounting for the drivers, as well

as the drivers themselves, and is sealed at the front by an inner housing that features the taper needed and the tube to hold the rubber bung.



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Three bung sizes are supplied and in a more usual return to form, I had to go straight for the largest one. This is partly because the EH-008 has a unique seal in that behind the rubber dome is a secondary seal that is arranged diagonally across the housing and is intended to provide further isolation at the pinna of the ear. The effect is intermittently successful. In principle, the EH-008 has two points of fitting which reduces how critical each one is and should increase comfort. In practice I found the system works fairly well but my wife found the Furutech to be very uncomfortable and anyone with an inner ear piercing would probably need to rule them out completely.

The EH-008 shares a production process in common with Furutech cabling in that all metal components have been cryogenically treated and demagnetised prior to their assembly into the final product. As no untreated pair of EH-008s exists to compare against, it isn't possible to make any meaningful

comparison on what this process brings to performance but it does suggest again that Furutech has put a significant amount of effort into the construction of their earphone.

This is also evidenced in the carry case supplied with the EH-008. This is essentially a hyperbolic triangle shaped affair, with the curve extending to the end of the case that uses a padded outer shell. Inside is a soft touch foam moulding that allows the housings and the cable jack to be mounted in a fixed place and the cable wrapped around to prevent tangling. Compared to the minor work of genius that is the Sennheiser IE800 case it is a little fiddly to use and it isn't as showy as the demented but lovely cigarette tin that the Final is supplied in but it works extremely well. It is a little deep to easily keep in a trouser pocket however. In keeping with a number of high-end earphones, the EH-008 has no provision for a microphone or inline remote control - although as Furutech is presumably hoping you'll also plump for one of their headphone amps, this is perhaps to be expected.

Setup

The main gist of the EH-008 review was using them with the Furutech ADL Cruise headphone amp to see how the two devices worked together but they were also tested directly into my Lenovo T530 ThinkPad, Google Nexus 5 and iPad 3. Additionally testing was undertaken with a Cambridge Audio DacMagic XS and a Chord Hugo, the latter as a more absolute judge of ability. Material used included lossless and high res FLAC, Spotify, Groovespark and on demand video material such as Netflix, iPlayer and Sky Go.

Sound Quality



The review pair were supplied absolutely brand new and as such were left ticking over connected to an iPhone 4. While this was happening, I continued using the recently reviewed Shure SE112 as my default 'in the pocket' earphones as despite their relatively lowly price, I've been consistently impressed with them. When I switched over to the Furutech, the effect was subtle but fairly profound. At nearly four times the price of the Shure, the Furutech needs to a significant step forward over the SE112 and so it proves to be - although it does cement in my mind just how good the Shure is.

The first and most important part of the EH-008's presentation is that there is not the slightest sense of where the larger driver finishes its presentation and the smaller one begins. Furutech provides no crossover data for the EH-008 and after some extended listening, I am none the wiser. What this means is that the EH-008 is effortlessly refined at the frequency extremes. This means that I did discover that although the Furutech is reasonably sensitive, I did tend to find myself driving them fairly hard because they go loud very effortlessly. Indeed, if you listen loud and like a bit of welly to your listening, the Furutech is a very fine partner indeed.



This is more than a tiny PA system though. The refinement of the EH-008 makes it able to handle voices and instruments with real tonal accuracy and a commendable sense of scale to even very large performances. It can't rival the utterly surreal sensation of a concert in your head that the Sennheiser IE800 can - a performance that is completely unconstrained by the sense of coming from a single earphone - but given the price differential, this is not too surprising. What I think is more significant is that some of this difference isn't down to the drivers or other technology but more to the fit of the EH-800. Listening to the Furutech alongside the far simpler Lindy IEM75 using the twin outputs of the Chord Hugo and a dual mono encoded version of Carbon Based Lifeforms *Abiogenesis*, I'm fairly sure that while I find the Furutech comfortable, the 'two stage' fitment is not able to provide the totality of seal - and with it the bass response - that a simpler fitting, such as used by the Lindy, can do.

At first, this seems slightly mystifying but doing the same side by side listening with some other earphones suggests that the Furutech gains a sense of space and depth to the presentation that more

conventional fitments - IE800 aside - simply can't rival. With the 16/44.1kHz FLAC download of Jon Allen's *Deep River*, this honest and careful recording is given a three dimensionality by the Furutech that lends the whole performance a believability that means I stopped making notes and just listened to the album - surely the whole point of the design. This space also gives film and TV material a useful airiness too.



The refinement of the EH-008 makes it able to handle voices and instruments with real tonal accuracy and a commendable sense of scale

The EH-800 performed well connected directly to the respectable but average headphone outputs of various devices (and managed to sound halfway decent on the end of the Nexus 5 which is no small feat) but the Furutech benefits from the extra power and current delivery of external amps. The simple and relatively affordable Cambridge Audio DacMagic XS manages to fill out performance a little and improve the already impressive sense of effortlessness. As you might expect, switching to the (admittedly rather more expensive) partner of the ADL Cruise begins to reap some serious benefits. The current delivery of the Cruise helps to beef up the slight limit to the EH-800's bass and the extremely refined presentation of the earphone counters the slight tendency toward harshness when the Cruise is driven to high levels.

Given that the price of this combination exceeds £600, it really ought to be excellent but it is worth noting that the Cruise is the most expensive of the Furutech headphone amps. The less expensive models would combine with the EH-008 at an altogether lower price and this might be where the EH-008 really comes into its own. Certainly, the performance with the £100 DacMagic XS results in a £275 bundle that would take some beating.

Conclusion

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Such is the range of earphones available right now that pretty much regardless of how niche your requirements, there is equipment out there to meet them. I hesitate to describe the EH-008 as 'niche' but there is no doubt in my mind that the best performance you can get from them is not achieved by simply purchasing them as a standalone product. In this regard they are good but given a tough fight by the Final Heaven IV. Where they excel is when they are given a better quality headphone output - the very ones Furutech has been making for the last two years.

The Furutech delivers on the features I would hope to see from the company. They are technically interesting, beautifully finished and capable of fine performance. If you are in a position to meet some of their demands, this is an earphone that is capable of magnificent results.

<http://www.avforums.com/review/furutech-adl-eh-008-earphone-review.10524>