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Audiohead (USA) – ADL H118

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The Alpha Design Labs ADL H118 Headphone

BY AUDIOHEAD – APRIL 13, 2013



Alpha Design Labs is a Tokyo-based company known for its [recent DAC products], while its parent company Furutech is rooted in audio parts and cables. The ADL H118 (\$270) represents the company's newest entry into the land of headphones with a closed-back, dynamic driver design.

Nominal impedance is 68 ohms at 1kHz so a separate headphone amplifier isn't a requirement, but rather a nice bonus if you want a little extra in the power department. The ear cup features a unique triangular shape that fits around your ear. Out of the box one of the first things I noticed was the shape of the headband seemed a bit narrower than most, top to bottom. The headband does expand properly to give you a nice snug fit. The caliper pressure of the headband is moderate and the overall weight is fairly light. From the way I wore the headphones the biggest squeeze came from the upper regions of the ear cup, which I prefer. Overall I found both the headphone and the triangle ear cups to be quite comfortable and provide a solid seal against my head (a must for proper bass).



A majority of the construction material is a hearty black plastic that felt quite durable across all exteriors and joints. The leatherette ear pads felt fairly typical for headphones of this type. The H118 offers a mini XLR type connection at the base of the left side. This mini jack is a three prong design that can be swapped out for other cables, but precludes the headphones from an easy path for balanced connections. For the majority of my review I stuck with the upgraded Furutech iHP-35 cable, which I quite enjoyed. Both the connector design and build of the cable were first rate. I am a big fan of the proliferation of more standard headphone connections, especially the mini XLR size that both the LCD-3 and this ADL headphone utilize. The headband hinges fold inward to allow for a more compact storage shape.



The H118's sound signature is aligned with many of the more mainstream consumer headphones currently on the market. I notice a fair mid bass bump throughout the rigors of testing. The bass had more of a presence than the Sennheiser HD650 low-end grunt, but not quite as much grip on the very lowest regions by comparison. The ADL made bass guitar and drum thump much easier to pick out of the overall mix. While the H118 was unable to escape some of the inevitable limitations of closed back design in terms of overall openness, the lower mid region exhibited great body and a low center of gravity. Vocals felt like their energy was poised in the lower mids, rather

than the mid to high region. The high-end signature was more in tune with the HD650 than the excitable V-Moda M80. The M80 had more of a forward slant in the highs where the ADL danced more in the midband. Now it should be known that I am a fan of the HD650s tonal structure. The ADL mirrors that response more so than the M80s or even my reference pair of Audeze LCD-3s. It's a comfortable place to linger, as it can be quite cozy and warm in there. While the signature style may be shared, at nearly twice the cost the 650s did manage to best the H118 in terms of resolution. I also noticed a bit of a peak in the treble on some recordings, but for the most part the H118 was very forgiving of poor source material.



Overall I found the Alpha Design Labs H118 to be very comfortable, both in terms of fit and sound signature. Look to these headphones if you like a little extra bass in your audio punch. I'm a fan of laid back sound signature and it resemblance to the Sennheiser HD650, even though it is not an exact replicate across all audiophile metrics. The unique triangle-shaped ear pads were surprisingly comfortable to my ears and build was solid for the price. The H118 is definitely a pair of cans you will want to check out if you are looking for a mid-priced headphone with a slightly bass-forward, closed-back design.

<http://audio-head.com/the-alpha-design-labs-adl-h118-headphone/>