

FURUTECH

HiFi Choice (UK) – ADL H118 Review
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ADL H118/iHP-35 headphones

ONLY IF YOU'VE been in a cave for the past few years would it not have come to your attention that headphones have become the new iPod. By this, I mean that the coolest gadget *de nos jours* is no longer a small white iDevice you can show off to your friends, because they've all got one, too. Instead, it is now a large pair of earspeakers that earns you bar room bragging rights – headphones are suddenly all the rage and hi-fi manufacturers haven't been slow to respond.

Alpha Design Labs (ADL to you and I) is a relatively new Japanese brand from cable specialist Furutech. In its short time on the planet, it has specialised in small music playing gadgets, and headphones have played a big part. So it's no surprise that the company now has its very own set of cans, complete with an interesting cable upgrade option to boot. The phones themselves will set you back £225, with a 1.3m iHP-35 upgrade lead costing £75 and a 3m lead £100. All in all, the top spec of the H118 comes in at a not inconsiderable £325.

Quality feel

At this price, it ought to be good, and certainly the quality feels right, as you'd expect from a premium Japanese product. It's a closed-back design, meaning it seals out most of the outside sound – this makes it ideal for noisy outdoor use (although obviously don't use where it could put you in peril!), and many audiophiles believe this to be more desirable in terms of sonics, too. Basically in an enclosed space, the bass can be controlled better and this often results in a tight, propulsive bottom end.

The transducers themselves are 40mm high-resolution extra-large high-flux neodymium drivers, engineered to keep ultra-high frequencies in phase. The voice coils are made with copper-coated special aluminium alloy wire, said to be very lightweight to improve transient response. The stock wire comes with a non-magnetic Furutech rhodium-plated stereo



(Alpha) mini XLR socket, and there's a 3m cable and a gold-plated 3.5mm-to-6.3mm adapter.

The ADLs are certainly a firm fit, lacking the luxuriousness of the similarly priced Philips Fidelio X1/00, for example. But a little fiddling with the adjusters and moving around, and you soon get them feeling comfy. Even correctly placed, some will find them less than a sumptuous wearing experience – think more in terms of firm German car seats than French sofa-style ones! They're certainly not uncomfortable, and indeed they seem to do better over extended wear periods than many, but you'll never forget you're wearing them.

Keeping it clean

These cans have a satisfyingly clean, 'studio' sort of sound that's devoid of any sonic nasties sometimes found on hi-fi headphones. Treble isn't in any way bright or fizzy, the H118s rendering the ride cymbals on Caravan's *Nine Feet Underground* with precision and poise. The midband integrates nicely with this and is detailed and spacious without being overly clinical. It flows along nicely, these headphones refusing to deconstruct the music excessively,

as some can. Bass is decently extended and generally decently tight, although there's a slight warmth in the upper bass/lower midband that gives bass guitars and left-handed piano work an extra shove, making lower frequencies more direct and engaging. It's certainly not an altogether unpleasant experience, although open-backed designs such as the Sennheiser HD650 are a little more even. That said, those hipsters listening to Kanye West on their Beats by Dr Dre headphones will still find the ADL H118s far too wimpishly neutral!

The upgrade lead brings a useful improvement in sound quality, although the extra £100 takes the package into some pretty tough territory. If you're the owner of stock 118s, then you'll really appreciate the extra midband clarity, treble shimmer and bass grip, but if you're contemplating buying the upgrade lead with a new pair of 118s, then you might like to hear the Audio Technica ATH-A900X, which is stiff competition at £340. These are even more detailed and open, albeit a good bit bigger and far less suited to music on the move. **DP**

DETAILS

PRICE
£325
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OUR VERDICT

