



Hear Me Out

BY SAM WHITEHEAD AND JESSICA PROKUP

THERE I WAS, SITTING IN THE WAITING ROOM of an audiologist, surrounded by people at least twice my age, all waiting to get fitted for hearing aids. Honestly, I thought it would be many years before I found myself in such a situation.

Truth be told, I haven't yet joined the AARP. I was in that specialist's office to have silicone molds made of my ears. I then sent the molds to the high-tech audio magicians at Ultimate Ears, who crafted me a pair of truly slamming ear-phones, aka personal monitors. The process took about a week. Since then, I've lived in a constant state of mind-boggling, hi-fi symphonic bliss.

There's a long list of professional musicians who swear by these earphones, including David Bowie, Metallica, U2, The Rolling Stones, and many others. These snug-fitting mini-miracles will rock your world — even when you're on a bike, at speed, the wind blasting in your face. I chose a half-shell version of the company's UE-5c model, since it was more streamlined than the full-shell version. When worn with a half-helmet, the monitors allow only a minimal amount of wind in your ears. If you're looking to wear the monitors under a full-face lid, your comfort will depend on the thickness of the helmet's padding



State Laws For Helmet Speakers

AK No restrictions	IL No restrictions	ND No restrictions	PR No restrictions
AL No restrictions	IN No restrictions	NE No restrictions	RI Prohibited to use or possess
AR No restrictions	KS No restrictions	NH No restrictions	SC No restrictions
AZ No restrictions	KY No restrictions	NJ No restrictions	SD No restrictions
CA Single earphone only	LA No restrictions	NV No restrictions	TN No restrictions
CO No restrictions	MA Prohibited to use or possess	NY Single earphone only	TX No restrictions
CT No restrictions	MD Single earphone only	OH No restrictions	UT No restrictions
DC No restrictions	ME No restrictions	OK No restrictions	VA No restrictions
DE No restrictions	MI No restrictions	OR No state restrictions; some cities have ordinances disallowing headsets or speakers in all vehicles	VT No restrictions
FL No restrictions	MN Single earphone only	PA For communication purposes only	WA No restrictions
GA For communication purposes only	MO No restrictions		WI No restrictions
HI No restrictions	MS No restrictions		WV No restrictions
IA No restrictions	MT No restrictions		WY No restrictions
ID No restrictions	NC No restrictions		

Source: American Motorcyclist Association. For a comprehensive list of state laws, go to amadirectlink.com.

SOURCES

UE-5c \$550
ULTIMATE EARS
 5 Jenner St., Ste. 100
 Dept. RB
 Irvine, CA 92618
 800/589-6531
ultimateears.com

HearPlugs
 Call for pricing
NOW HEAR THIS
 10265 NW 56th St., Dept. RB
 Doral, FL 33178
 305/477-2333
plugup.com

and how tight you like to squeeze your noggin. It's probably best to try fitting an earplug mold under your helmet before you buy the monitors, since Ultimate Ears aren't exactly cheap. They are, however, well worth the cake.

The company offers several models, each of which comes with a sleek metal carrying case. But that's beside the point. If it's studio-quality fidelity you're after, Ultimate Ears will blow you away. — *SW*

WHILE SAM WAS WHILING AWAY the hours in a plush medical office, I sat on a folding chair in our photo studio with Trish squirting goop into my ear with a syringe. I'd decided to test a do-it-yourself custom ear mold kit from Now Hear This, to see if you really could create usable molds at home. It took a couple of tries on each ear before my molds looked like the illustrations in the instructions, but we did it. I received my custom earplug speakers within a week, and the fit was near perfect.

I say "near" because they might have turned out better if I'd gone to a recommended specialist (an option if you're not comfortable making the molds yourself). But when I put the plugs in my ears, they created a solidly sound-tight seal. And that's exactly what I was looking for. I've noticed that, even with a full-face helmet, my ears ring all night after a day of riding. Bad sign.

I also like listening to music while I ride, and my iPod earbuds weren't cutting it. They hurt under my helmet, and since they don't block wind noise, I had to turn the music way up just to hear it. The first time I tried my new custom earphones, it was a musical miracle. Not only had the wind been reduced to a soft whoosh, but I could hear every note of my favorite songs. Best of all, I didn't have to turn the volume up high, so when I came to a stop, the music wasn't blasting.

The sound quality of my earphones may not match the ultra hi-fi experience of Sam's monitors, but then, neither does the price. And while Sam's earplugs are made of a hard material, mine are soft and flexible. They fit well under my full-face lid, though they get squished into my ears a bit, and I feel it at the end of the day. If you're looking for just ear protection, you can order custom plugs without speakers. Now Hear This offers earbuds, helmet speakers, and custom earplugs for a variety of applications. — *JP RB*

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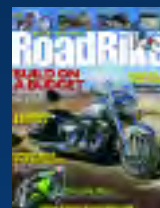
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