

"The iGrado reproduces important midrange frequencies that are free of any discoloration and compression, with high frequencies sounding very decent and delicate. As a result there is indeed a tonal balance and characteristic which can hardly be topped in the portable world." HOMEelectronics Magazine/Switzerland

"Comparable sound from earbuds would likely cost twice as much as the Grado. At its price, the iGrado hits a mobile-music sweet spot." Kevin Hunt / Chicago Tribune

"...the iGrado exhibited much detailed information, yet remained relaxed during loud musical passages, while at the same time portraying a very natural musical finesse. Grado continues their success story with this new model" Stereoplay Highlight (Editors Choice).

"Sound is top class with a performance ratio considered outstanding". Stereoplay magazine / Germany

"The iGrado puts out a warm, heavy bass sound in over-ear phones. Take heed: Going back to your standard iPod buds after listening to the Grado models will make your old music sound tinny, and a little irritating." Michael Booth / denverpost.com."

...those, having heard the Grado one time, will be in no hurry to take them off. Out of this acoustic ear muff comes such a crystal-clear and uncolored sound, that people suddenly will sense all the weak-points of data-compressed music." Audio magazine / Germany

"Big sound and bigger quality: Grado has packed a high-quality sound system into a portable package you can use with your MP3 player." HGTV / I Want That! Tech Toys

"...sounds like a "big" Grado; awesome resolution of fine musical detail, very clear and neutral." Audio magazine / Germany.

WHAT HI-FI

A whole new headphone world. By Tim Bowen

GRADO SR80 FIVE STARS

Grado SR80 Headphones. For vivid detail and expansive presence. There may be more comfortable 'phones around, but no others around the price provide such an enthralling private musical universe.

[These are exceptional headphones, separated from many of their peers by sheer expression.](#) While other 'phones can sound a tad flat and timid compared with loud speakers, the Grados' vivid delivery punches home every note with dynamic enthusiasm.

Creating a stereo image of excellent depth and clarity, they ensure every detail is heard, every strand separated. Bass hits hard and fast, with an impact that's rare in headphones even at this price, the mid and is open and impressively lucid, and all that's topped by a sweet and focused table.

And while they know how to kick, they manage to maintain an image that's perfectly proportioned and beautifully balanced. This Mortal Coil's Mr. Somewhere sounds clean and spacious, each delicate detail set in sharp relief. Rich, resonant cello is balanced to the right, plucked semi-acoustic guitar to the left, while keyboard chords roll around you and the bewitching voice of Caroline Crawley whispers inside your head. [The intimacy intoxicates.](#) The only criticisms we can make are that the SR80's don't look or feel as good as they sound. They perch a tad precariously on your ears and comfort is not their strongest asset.

But John Grado says he strove for the best sounding 'phones possible for the money, and when you hear them it's hard to argue.

Though only second from the bottom in Grado's five-strong range of hand-built Prestige headphones, the SR80s are capable of transporting you to beautiful new musical worlds .

Headphone fans will love them, anti-phoners should swallow their pride and plug up a pair for audition.

CD REVIEW Vol.10 No.6

HOT NEW HEADPHONES By Daniel Kumin

GRADO'S - SR80

Grado Labs is a small, Brooklyn, NY outfit with a long history in the phonograph cartridge business - one of making products that outperform the competition at a tenth of the cost. A relatively recent entrant in the headphone biz, Grado makes four basic models, and two more high end versions under the Joseph Grado Signature label.

All four Grados share basic similarities, including the SR-80 model under review here: Dome drivers, supra-aural ,open -back design, and ultra -simple construction. The SR80s thus employ a 13/4-inch, plastic diaphragm driver that's similar in all the essentials to the Grado Signature models three and four times it's price; a simpler ,plastic enclosure and some less careful driver matching appear to be the main differences. Construction is extremely simple. The earcups are suspended on a spring band in almost precisely the same way as WWII-vintage aircraft headsets; simple foam rings provide the contact surface.

And yet , even though the form looks a bit low-tech, the SR80s are wonderfully comfortable; quite lightweight (about 9 ounces),with a surprisingly light cord that's free of mechanical rattle noises. The SR80S are more than fit for all day wear, and unlike many lightweight on the ear designs, they don't tend to slide out of position when you move your head-in all, the SR80S testify to the virtues of simplicity. (They do, however, exert fairly high on ear/on head pressure. I found this noticeable after an hour or so; others with smaller heads - I take a 7 3/4 hat - might not).As to sound quality, the Grados are quite remarkable. Transparency and detail are the most immediate impression: [The SR80S deliver a crystal clear window on the recording](#)(and playback system!) that exists without the treble exaggeration usually associated with super-detailed headphone sound. Treble can feel a tad lifeless on spatially flat recordings, but from the better discs the combination of smooth yet wide -ranging highs and mid-balance structure is little short of remarkable; You'd have to spend 15 times as much on speakers to get this sort of organic, musical weave. Bass is seemingly limitless in extension and notable for balance and finesse, as is the SR-80s dramatic transient ease; Thanks to this combo well -recorded rock trap drums sounded absolutely sumptuous.

The SR80S are fairly low impedance(32ohms), and moderately sensitive(94 dB SPL 1mW/1 kHz). The combination works okay directly into portable CD players, with just about acceptable volume at moderate settings to which most Discpersons are limited for decent sound quality. Through a better headphone amp, of course, the SR80S delivered full volume, dynamics, and quality; indeed, they managed quite high levels with aplomb - one of audio's brightest values.

WHAT HI-FI

GRADO SR80 - FIVE STAR RATING

Some headphones achieve sales appeal by being unconventional - witness the Ergos - others with ultra-stylish, classy build. The Grado SR80's do neither; they look fairly inexpensive, and they aren't all that comfortable. Each open-backed pad sits on, rather than over, each ear, and rather awkwardly too.

But for all that, these are truly wonderful headphones. They have frequency response up to 20kHz and 108dB/mW sensitivity, and despite being open backed models, they've got the bass energy to power into Prodigy or The Chemical Brothers, ripping into heavy tracks with a gusto that eludes lesser rivals. You can crank rock to ear-smarting levels too, thanks to treble detail that's smooth and articulate. With vocals they intoxicate with a natural feel and beautifully proportioned sound stage; few headphones can transport you as convincingly to the smoky confines of Erykah Badu's On and On.

The Grado SR 80s are special, even though they might not look it. Buy 'em, and love 'em.

Conclusion: Headphones are as clearly divided between sonic camps as other types of hi-fi. The Ergos, for example, sound simply divine with jazz, acoustic and classical music, but lack the bite to rock. The Sonys by contrast, ripple with bass muscle, but aren't the ideal choice for subtle music. It's also interesting that looks, and subjective build, don't seem to count for much: of all our contenders, it's the Grado SR80s - the most visually underwhelming cans here - that sound best. For a little bit of everything, they're the winners here!

Play Magazine

FESTIVAL OF CANS by Dayna B

LET'S TALK GRADO HEADPHONES.

The Brooklyn Trio - A Headphone Selection from Grado Laboratories

THESE HAND-ASSEMBLED CANS may look identical, but they don't sound identical. While the SR60, SR80 and SR125 have a certain family resemblance; each step up in price brings performance up as well.

The Grado headphones have a vented diaphragm design that incorporated a large air chamber for lowering the diaphragm resonance and extending bass response. Okay! So they press against

your ears. This construction is known as supra-aural design and almost guarantees that they won't be as comfortable as circum-aural type cans. However, a little judicious bending will go far toward making the Grados comfortable.

Something else to consider is the relatively low impedance (32 ohms) of all Grado headphones. This allows for a more synergistic interface with most high-quality headphone output devices. However, those who plan on using mass-market receivers or portables with Grado cans will get best results from a dedicated headphone amp.

[Entry-Level Redefined - Grado SR60](#)

THIS IS THE HEADPHONE that took the world by storm some years ago, but perhaps you missed it. If you don't want to make a major investment in 'phones, consider these babies. I'd have to go far to find a better sounding set of cans to recommend at this price.

Now, it does take some effort to make the SR60 comfortable. Be patient! Bend the steel band to gently conform to your head and the pinch will go away. The relatively large open air chamber lowers the driver's resonant frequency, and that's worth the extra effort.

The SR60 uses Mylar diaphragms driven by copper voice coils, neodymium magnets and a copper connecting cord terminated with a mini-plug and a quarter-inch adapter.

I started the LPs spinning and was immediately struck by the SR60's ability to keep the tempo. Rhythm and pace were portrayed naturally on Tori Amos' Boys For Pele (Atlantic 82862-1). While the SR60 produced stability in imaging, its earpads created some indistinctness. There was a slight roll-off in the upper register of the piano, creating a smooth transition that softened the presentation. You might not object - especially if your cans serve portable duty. At the other end of the frequency spectrum, the bass was a bit loose and woolly. This was noticeable on Elton John's Made In England (Classic Records 314-526 915-1), where the electric bass was slightly over-sized.

Both these albums, however, made it obvious that sound quality from the SR60 was quite good. Quantity, though, was slightly reduced by the earpads. The dynamic range was compressed a little, but the small-scale variations that are most responsible for contrast were not affected as much.

The overall impression of the SR60s is that the music is slightly veiled - it's a bit like listening behind a curtain. This effect was not severe; in fact it was rather subtle. It will depend upon the listening level. In sum, the SR60s have a sweet presentation, a "natural" and pleasing sound. So, in spite of any niggling criticisms, this is the place to start looking for budget headphones.

[A Best Buy - Grado SR80](#)

The SR80 cost a few dollars more than the SR60, yet it's a better buy. Why? [Because its performance is astounding for its price.](#) The features of this model are similar to the SR60 (the earpads and wire are the major differences), so let's just move on to the sound.

To test the SR80's ability to swing, I started out with Bush's Sixteen Stone (Trauma Records INTD-92531). On "Machinehead," there are some guitar riffs with extremely complex rhythms. The SR80s did an excellent job of following these complexities. And yes, these cans can slam! The superb timing performance also permitted very good imaging on Mozart (Misha Rachlevsky/Symphony Orchestra Kremlin), with the orchestra solidly located - inside my head. Well, that's what happens to stereo images with headphone. On Tori Amos' Boys For Pele, image separation was quite good, but there was some loss of air around the instruments.

The tonal balance was relatively even, with a very slight bloat in the lower midrange. The recreation of the piano on both Boys For Pele and John's Made In England revealed this quite clearly. I would say this variance is relatively benign, though. Given the difficulties of recording the piano well, this problem probably won't break your heart.

The timbral presentation of the SR80s was excellent, with a natural sense of instruments and voice. The subtle nuances of Tori Amos' sultry voice were present throughout. In addition, on the Mozart, the oboe and violin sounded quite natural and real, especially when they were played in the range of the human voice.

These cans fit into the sweet spot of this happy trio from Grado Labs. They are balanced, they boogie, and they provide enough detail to satisfy music lovers. The sound is full and comforting.

[The High End - Grado SR125](#)

WHILE THE SR80 gives you a good taste of the high end, the SR125 is high end. One has to make no excuses for its performance.

This model Grado uses special "de-stressed" diaphragms (as in removing stress, not as in false aging of your designer jeans or "antiquing" of cheap wood!), a voice coil wound from ultra-high-purity,

long-crystal (UHPLC) oxygen-free copper, and a UHPLC copper connecting cord with a quarter-inch plug termination.

On a more musical note, once again, the timing of this Grado headphone proved to be an asset. The 125 were stable, tight, and yet tuneful. The rhythm and beat were well defined throughout the listening sessions, no matter what I threw its way. The stability of harmonic structure in time and perceived space gave rise to well-defined imaging. There was an excellent sense of separation between images, with good bloom around the instruments. On Mozart, the orchestra's sections were well placed, while instruments had a natural sense of air about them.

The SR125 displayed a high degree of intelligibility and clarity. Obscure vocals became quite easy to untangle, as evinced on Bush's Sixteen Stone, where all, for once, became clear. On Amos' Boys For Pele, there was an extremely good sense of silence between notes. These two characteristics allowed transient events to be represented in a stunning, and satisfying, manner. Harpsichord plucks were quite incisive on Boys For Pele, and on John's Made In England, the initial percussive strike of the kickdrum and the rimshots were full of whack. They also decayed in a natural fashion.

[These headphones reproduced music with a high degree of tonal purity.](#) Timbral accuracy was superb, with Tori Amos' Bosendorfer piano maintaining its characteristic tangible, rich texture. The sound of the orchestra on the Mozart was well balanced, full and complete. Strings were rosy. The brass had bite without acid. The woodwinds were reedy and woody. Flutes well, fluted silverily.

Overall, the Grado SR125 produced a weighty, full-bodied sound, keeping intact the very soul of the music. At least to my taste! It recreated the presence of the performance, providing contrast and drama. [It is a joy to listen with, and should hold you over until you can afford that killer speaker system.](#)

[Summing Up the Trio](#)

Of these Three Grado headphones, the SR60 has the comfort edge and seems more appropriate for portable use. It can also serve as an inexpensive second set of headphones. The choice for best all-around 'phones, though, goes to the SR80. This is well suited for either portable or dorm use and will serve music lovers well for late-night listening. It is quite reasonably priced. My highest recommendation, however, goes to the SR125. It provides a very rewarding listening experience. Some may not wish to spend the money, but if you try it out, you may just find yourself saving a little bit longer to get this more expensive model.

[A Bonus-The Reference - Grado Reference Series RS1](#)

Before you faint at the price of this "mere" headphone, let me say that it is truly reference grade. The most noticeable difference between the RS1 and all other Grado headphones is the mahogany earcups. They are specially cured between production steps and serve as the foundation for the air chamber that affects the transducer resonances. It is the wood's special characteristics that enhance the tone of the driver.

Like the SR125, the RS1's diaphragms are "de-stressed". In this case, the technique is applied in two stages for increased control. The voice coil and connecting cord are both made of an ultra-high purity, long-crystal (UHPLC) oxygen-free copper with a quarter-inch plug termination. Did I mention the leather headband (comfort and style!) and the wooden case that this model comes in? Nice packaging!

[In brief, the RS1 has a tonal richness that outshines all other headphones. Period!](#) The presentation has such depth and body, you'll have a hard time believing that you're listening to headphones. These wooden babies are sweet, yet extremely dynamic. They are capable of tremendous drive, impact and energy. They've got rhythm, pace and slam. They produce stable images with a sense of space; they bring out subtle musical details.

The Grado RS1 may not be the final word on resolution-you really does need loudspeakers to do that and excellent quality loudspeakers to boot - but it comes quite close. For my book, these headphones get the music in as intricate detail as possible without sounding clinical. Their performance is superbly detail and musically satisfying. They get my headphone vote.

The Absolute Sound
Vol.19. No.12

A Musician Compares Headphones to the Real Thing
by Dan Schwartz

So Frank Doris calls me and sez, "I got these headphones from John Grado and they sound awfully good!" So I say to Frank; "Can I hear 'em?" So the next thing I know, I gets the SR 60's! And I realize I'm in trouble because I like them better than the six-hundred dollar HP-1's. And if I'm gonna say that in print I better be right. They're more

comfortable, less of a vise-grip on the skull, and their top-to-bottom extension is better than my personal HP-1's, this determined using a demo CD-R that John Grado included with the new set. The top end is probably cruder, but who can tell since the HP-1s have none and for the comparatively low cost it's still ridiculously good.

So I beat my breast and wail to the heavens, and finally I call John, the Next Generation, and I tell him of my conclusions. Like it would be to any reasonable manufacturer, hearing that his bottom-of-the-line is better than his top-of-the-line is disturbing to him. Instead of calling me a subjectivist wacko, he offers to update my cans to current spec, i.e., the new wire. I accept. Overnight air to Brooklyn (with a check in the box to pay for the SR60's, just in case). Overnight air back. I listen. I still think the cheapos kill the HP-1's. I hear no improvement. He says this cannot be. Turns out he installed new wire up to the phase switches. But from the switch to the diaphragm it's still the old wire. So it can be. Overnight air to Brooklyn. Overnight back, Aha! Yes, now something happened. I hate admitting it was just a wire that made the difference, but I like my HP-1's again. I understand why Gary Galo had no complaints about the top end of the HP-2's. My bass on Sheryl Crow's record sounds like my bass again. And on "No One Said It Would Be Easy", right after my awkward little unamplified miked-electric guitar break the sound you hear finally sounds like what it is; Sheryl lighting a match at the vocal mike during an instrumental break.

John must have made an adjustment to the headband too, because the HP-1's don't hurt anymore. The SR60's are still more comfortable. But it's a pleasure having a reference I can enjoy and rely on again. While the HP-1s were in transit I did a mix with the SR60s and the 580s and, probably due to inexperience with them, I got terrible mixes. You will still hear more top with the SR60's than the HP-1s, but I'm hard put to determine which is correct. Is more recording hiss accurate or an exaggeration? Using my own tapes, my sense is that neither is exactly right. The SR60s elevate the top slightly, but in a remarkably uncrude way. The "tizzy" quality I usually hear with bright headphones is absent. Just alot of top. For the modest asking price, they're stupid good. If you don't feel like jumping into this way of listening with a big expenditure, buy these with no doubts and plug'em into your headphone output.

STEREOPHILE Vol.17 No.6

GRADO SR60 HEADPHONES

What the hell is going on with headphones these days?! By:

Corey Greenberg

I mean, the past couple years have seen the whole headphone trip suddenly break on through to the other side after decades of numbingly bad sound. Yeah, the high-dollar Stax electrostatics had always been there if you really wanted some quality headphones, but even they had their problems with coloration and treble steeliness. Other than that, though, it was a real teenage wasteland, with Koss, AKG, Sony and Sennheiser all battling it out to see who could produce a less mediocre pair of headphones than the rest of the pack. If you wanted comfort, you choose Sennheiser. Bass, Koss. "Studio sound," AKG. Me, I was a headphone slut--I played around with all these brands, trying to find a pair I could live with, But nothing I heard was cool enough to warrant a long-term commitment.

Then suddenly, a couple of years ago, Joe Grado came out of left field with headphones that totally rewrote the book. I'd sworn off 'phones by that point, but all it took was a quick listen to those neww Grados and I had to have 'em. They were so clean, so clear, so detailed--so right. I bought the HP 2s without even thinking twice, they freaked me out so bad. Now I use them all the time as my Ultimate Rez Rig--if I can't hear it with the Grados, it ain't be.

OK, so that's the High-End. But what about the low end, where me and my friends eat our government cheese and wait for the high tech to trickle down to our demograph? Sure, now you can buy \$300 dynamic headphones that kill yesterday's \$2000 electrostats, but the under-\$100 market is still Dungville with a capital D. There's around 14,000 different models ranging from el cheapo earpuds that buzz like bees to Walkman-style squawkers to big puffy-cushioned "Digital Ready U-Bet" jobs at the top of the lines. All of these suck, and suck hard--I recently spent several days going around to various Dung Huts that sell these headphones alongside Bose speakers, microwave ovens, and Dirt devils, and when it was over I just wanted to lower myself into a tub of Noxzema and be left alone for a couple of months. Forget radiation testing on humans--I'll happily mainline any glowing syringe Uncle Sam cares to try out on me so long as he doesn't clap a pair of Satanic cheap-ass dungphones on my head while he's cooking my wooks.

And it's not just us Mud People who want good cheap cans, either. Even the well-healed audiophile doesn't wanna take his mudy expensive headphones along when he travels, even if they do annihilate the cheap-ass set that came with his portable CD player or Walkman. Besides which, the cool-mam Grados seem to be a pretty tough load for the portable gear I've tried them with--The Grados need quite a bit more in the way of speaker-driving juice before they sing than those little open-air giveaway 'phones, and the typical anemic output stages in portable CD and cassette players just can't drive them to decent levels with any kind of quality. The \$20 cheapest-possible Sony Walkman I bought at Target for po'-boy travel tunes burped like a fat baby when I tried driving the HP-2s with it, so I just stuck with the dungphones that came with the player when traveling and left the Grados at home. And every time I'd fly somewhere, I'd sit there with these awful 'phones quacking in my ears thinking, "OK, we lift off, I yell my demands and wave the gun. No--First I wave the gun, then I tell the pilot to fly to Cypress. Man I wish Joe Grado would do a great cheap headphone I could drive with this Walkman! I'd pay for something like that if it was out there. Wave, then yell. Wave, yell. Soon I shall be with my brothers in the struggle again."

Joe Grado's got legendary ears--did he hear my plea?

GRADO SR60 - The new SR60 is the cheapest model in Grado's new Prestige series of affordable headphones based on the same technology featured in the HP1 and the HP-2 Signature series. Joes's nephew John explained to me that the [Grado Mojo can basically be boiled down to one essential goal: the elimination of resonance. In developing the He-Man Grados, every part was specially designed and treated to reduce resonances so the dynamic speaker driver could operate from a perfectly rigid structure--Grado claims this is why they have such great resolution and freedom from coloration.](#) You get a bit more resonance as you go down the Grado line, John says, and you lose a bit more detail and transparency, but the family resemblance between the top-of-the-line HP-1 and the el cheapo SR60 remains strong. With the SR60, Grado specifically targeted the Walkman-style headphones that come with portable CD and cassette players-- the littlest Grado has been given a higher sensitivity and an easier load than the Signature Series models to allow for better performance from the current-limited headphone circuits in most portable gear.

The SR60 looks like an HP-2 made of black plastic, with a vinyl headband instead of the HP-2's leather one. The dynamic speaker driver appears similar to the one used in the Signature Series 'phones. As with the expensive Grado's, the SR60s are adjustable to fit even the most peanut-shaped head. I found them fairly comfortable--not the most forget-U-have-them-on cans I've ever worn, but certainly not as tiresome as the He-Man Grados can be after an extended session. The foam earpads are made of the same material as the Signature Series pads, so they don't do the "Seal-A-Meal" sweat number on your ears like the closed 'phones do. The SR60's driver voice-coil and headphone cable are made from "standard" copper wire, as opposed to the "Ultra High Purity Long Crystal" copper used in the more expensive models. As a nice touch, the SR60s come terminated with a gold 1/8" miniplug to fit portable CD and cassette players--no more having to use those Radio Shack adaptors to mate audiophile headphones with portable gear. A standard 1/4" gold phone-plug adaptor is included that snaps firmly on and stays there for use with landlubber hi-fi.

SYSTEM - I plugged the Grados into a HeadRoom Supreme headphone amplifier, which itself was plugged into the Tape Out jacks of either an Audible Illusions Modulus 3 preamp or my own buffered passive preamp. LPs were played on a Well-Tempered Turntable fitted with a Naim ARO tonearm and Sumiko Blue Point Special or Transfiguration MC cartridges, while CDs were played on a Theta Data II transport Linque'd to Theta's Gen.III processor. Eight-tracks were heard via this bitchin' Wollensak 8050A 8T deck I found in great shape at Goodwill for 13 bucks. All these pokies was strung together with Kimber KCAG and PBJ interconnects, and everything with a tail was plugged into a Power Wedge 116 AC line conditioner.

SOUND - Man oh man do I wish these cheap Grados were around when I bought the HP 2s! I'm not saying that the SR60s are as good as the He-Man Grado cans, but they get you about 85% of the way there, and for a fraction of the price. These things kill the dungphones, even the high-dollar ones that come in the lavish plastic boxes at your local Sound Whorehouse. And if you're still using those cheap-ass throwaway headphones that came with your portable CD or cassette player, you won't believe how much better your music will sound when you first plug these Grados in. Even though on an absolute scale that \$20 Walkman I got is a truly lousy product, it was capable of much better sound quality than the crappy headphones

that came with it. [If the SR60s could make a \\$20 Walkman listenable, think what they could do for your \\$200 portable CD player.](#)

The SR60 definitely sounds like a Grado--smooth, clear midrange, gobs of detail, killer bass, and silky-smooth highs that let you listen to music for hours without the fatigue of many far more expensive 'phones. Compared to the HP 2, the SR60 is more forward in the midrange, with a brighter overall balance that lacks the extreme smoothness of the \$495 Grado. This made for a livelier, more upfront sound than the more refined and neutral HP 2: These two headphones were clearly from the same family, but the cheaper SR60 definitely had a slightly less hearthrough quality through the range than the almost characterless HP 2. Vocals were a bit rougher and less precisely defined than through the HP 2s, and mixes that tended toward brightness--like Kim Wilson's Tigerman CD--were just a little more raucous with the cheap Grados.

I need to put this into perspective. Compared to anything I've heard out there, these Grados sound like the Voice O'God. They may give up some ground to their big brothers, but they handily plunder anything even remotely near their price. [In fact, I'd choose these Grados over any of the Stax electrostats I've heard--to my ears, they sound more natural and less colored through the midrange. If I was monitoring a recording, I'd feel perfectly comfortable using the Sr60s;](#) while I haven't heard a Stax yet, I wouldn't second-guess in terms of what I was hearing vs what I thought was actually making it to tape.

And wait till you hear these cheap Grados on some music that's got real bass! This may actually be their strong suit. Although direct comparison with the more evenly balanced HP 2s gave a the SR60s the impression that they were a little lean in the low end, the SR60s have an amazing bass range--tight and articulate.

[The clarity and power of these budget Grados is just totally unheard of in this price range--](#)HeadRoom's Tyll Hertsens came up behind me at the Stereophile party this past WCES and plopped a pair of haeadphones on my head that were cranking Primus's Pork Soda; I stood there grooving to Les Claypool's bizarro bass lines wondering what new super headphone Tyll was hippping me to. They were SR60s, driven by a HeadRoom and a portable CD player.

"Can you %#\$ BELIEVE these cheap Grados?!?!"

Tyll screamed at me.

So what don't you get from the cheap Grados that you do from the HP 2s and other He-Man cans? The SR60s lack the ultimate HF smoothness and freedom from midrange coloration of the expensive headphones. With the HP 2s driven by the HeadRoom Supreme, it was easy to hear way the hell back into the farthest reaches of the recording, all the way below the noise floor--even the slightest bit of mike preamp hiss or studio background noise was laid bare to hear without even so much as a squint. The SR60s have excellent resolution, but they were clearly bettered by the HP 2s--the difference in low-level detail retrieval between the HeadRoom's Process circuit and bypass listening were much more apparent with the HP 2s, for example.

Anyway, the point is that low-level stuff like this is what you don't get so much with the SR60s when compared to the He-Man 'phones. The budget Grados have higher resolution than almost any high-end loudspeaker on the market, but if you want the ultimate in detail, you need to pony up the dough for the Signatures.

As far as driving requirements go, the SR60 was much more tolerant of what it was plugged into than the HP 2. In addition to being more sensitive, the budget Grado 'phones must present an easier load--I could drive them to really loud levels with even the \$20 Walkman, and the same unit couldn't deal with the HP 2s at all without really fuzzing out of course, driving them with something like the HeadRoom amplifier gave much cleaner sound with bass that the Walkman's headphone outputs don't even hint at, but I got more than acceptable results with the SR60s plugged straight into the headphone outouts of CD and tape players.

CONCLUSION - I've really been on a roll lately with giant-killin' Real World hi-fi. After a pretty disappointing year spent wading through the mid-fi morass trying to find some really musical gear that me and my friends could afford, I'm finally starting to field some outstanding budget products. Now I can add the Grado SR60 headphones to the list. Way better than that honky crap supplied with portable CD and cassette players, the budget Grados stand comparison with audiophile headphones costing many times their price.

I really wish the SR60 had been around when I impulse-bought the HP 2--it may not be quite as refined, but the niether am I. For what I want out of a pair of headphones, the SR60 would've been what I took home. Way recommended!

DARK HORIZONS

IGN.COM / April 16th, 2001

Testing Ground: Grado SR 60 Headphones

Stunning sound and supreme valueshould put these cans on your shortlist. Awesome stuff

Product: Grado SR60 Rating: 10/10 By: Mike Wiley

Comments: Before I started this review I surfed around and read every review that I could find of these cans. Grado has a reputation, an excellent one, that far precedes them, but I was looking for something more specific. I was looking for bad reviews or at least some kind of fault finding. I had been using the SR 60s without stop since last week and couldn't think of a bad word for the review. But I wasn't alone; evidently, no one can think of a bad word for them. The praise for these cans is both universal and well deserved. I have listened to a good variety of headphones and few really rival the SR 60s. Even more significant, through, is the simple fact that no headphones in this price range even remotely approach the sound quality of these Grados. I hate to chase readers away from IGN, but I honestly suggest that everyone reading this article stop now and go buy a pair of these phenomenal headphones.

I typically have a section of basic stats and specs, but not today. Anyone looking for numbers and measurements would do well to check out the Grado website: gradolabs.com.

For those of you unfamiliar with Grado, the company has been around since 1953, when they started making phono cartridges in Brooklyn, NY. They have been making headphones since the 80's, and it's been aces since then. But enough history.

The SR 60s shares the utilitarian design that runs throughout the entire Grado line. They are made to sound good and be comfortable and that's all. I actually prefer this aesthetic to most contemporary cans, but those of you searching for space age looking headphones might be a bit disappointed. Hell, the high end Grados are made of wood and leather. More practical materials substitute these luxuries for the 60s: plastic and vinyl.

[Simple as they are in design, the SR 60s are extremely comfortable, which is almost as important as sound quality when it comes to headphones.](#) They are not the most comfortable models I used, but it's not hard to forget that you are wearing headphones with the SR 60. I have used them for a couple eight-hour stretches without having to shift them around at all.

Much of this comfort comes from the padding. Grado began using softer foam a couple of years ago and the change is easily appreciable. The current foam is smooth yet firm and never feels the least bit scratchy. The material is also very breathable. Headphones that make your ears sweat are a real pain in the ass, not to mention just plain gross. The SR 60 never got hot.

So how did they sound? In a word, brilliant. My favorite affordable cans have been the Panasonic RP-HT1000s since I first heard them, and I still think they are an excellent value, but the SR 60's really kicked the snot out of them. I really have never heard sound this sweet from headphones anywhere near this price range. I have a pair of Beyers at home that I laid a few hundred bucks for and I think I really prefer the SR 60s.

The whole spectrum sounds good, but the real strength of SR 60s is the high end. The highs are incredibly clear, without any harshness or sizzle. Nuances like cymbal decay and vocal reverb really come out as distinct sound, not just high-pitched debris. The highs are also very well balanced: no one section of the highs dominates the upper frequencies. This is one of the characteristics that makes the SR60s so listenable. The high-end clarity and smoothness practically eliminates ear fatigue. They tread lightly but make quite an impression.

The midrange was equally impressive. I think the best thing about the mids was the coherency. There were no peaks or valleys and everything simply stayed together. I listened to a lot of jazz with the 60s and the mid-range was really evenhanded during even the most complex and chaotic passages.

I love reading the manufacturer claims about frequency response, mostly because I like to see people being creative. Grado claims 20, which is fairly common. As you can tell, I used no benchmarks, but 20 seems pretty honest. The low-end extension took me by surprise. Bass lines and low, low harmonics that will stump even some speakers were very clearly articulated by the SR 60s. You could actually hear the depth of the sound in an upright bass. It sounds cheesy, but it really was like being there.

[I played all types of music through the SR60s, and it was happy to oblige on every occasion. The sound was always warm, smooth, and together.](#) They really get across the musicality of the material. I hate to sound like a reviewer with that last sentence, but it is simply the case.

What didn't I like about the SR 60s? Nothing. I have heard better headphones, but not for under five or six hundred bucks. And, even then, the sound is just better overall, not because the SR60s have a specific weakness. They don't.

As for value, I would venture to say that there will not be a better set of headphones for \$70.00 until Grado figures out a tweak for these. If you are on a budget, you simply must buy the SR60s. And there is no way in hell you will be disappointed.

[Recommend without reservation.](#) Performance -Stunning sound from top to bottom with a high end that is rarely matched in general and never matched in this price range. 10

Build Quality - Very simple and very solid. Nice, thick cable. 10

Features - Very high quality cable and a nice little 1/4-inch adapter. 10

Value - It is difficult to express how good a value these headphones are. 10

GRAMAPHONE

GRADO Prestige Black Cartridge

by: John Borwick

Joe Grado was amongst the founding fathers, so to speak, of high fidelity in the United States and the intervening 40 years have seen his company accumulate some 40 patents. He did pioneering work on moving - coil cartridges but most of the current Grado cartridges use the moving- iron principle. This has a fixed magnet and coil assembly and relies on the changes in magnetic field distribution caused by motion of a lightweight soft-iron element at the end of the cantilever remote from the stylus. Externally, and for matching purposes, there is little difference between moving iron pick -ups and the more common moving-magnet but the reduced weight of the mechanism of the former can provide high quality performance.

The Prestige range of cartridges comprises six models which have the same basic design but progress higher in performance, and price, in three linked pairs. The Black model is the least expensive and the next model up, the green, is actually selected from the Black production run as amongst the top 10% in terms of test specifications; and so on through the Blue/Red and Silver/Gold pairings.

On the face of it, then, the Grado Prestige Black comes to the market as an affordable replacement cartridge for use in modestly priced systems. Its relatively high sensitivity rating of 5mV makes it a good choice for less ambitious amplifiers and its recommended tracking force range of 1-2 grams makes it suitable for even quite basic pick-up arms. The low stylus tip mass contributes to an unusually wide frequency response extending to about 50kHz.

The elliptical diamond stylus is fixed to a brass bush at one end of the three-piece cantilever based on Grado's patented OTL (Optimized Transmission Line) principle. This consists of three sections telescoped together, using a mixture of alloys and hollow or solid construction, bonded by damping materials and coated with a black material providing further resonance absorption. A fixed axial pivot centres the soft-iron element between the two pairs of magnetic gaps. The system is accurately balanced and uses a reduced number of turns of oxygen-free copper wire to produce a lighter than usual assembly overall. Cartridge weight is 6 grams.

The cartridge is supplied with the standard two-hole mounting arrangement to suit any headshell. The stylus is user-replaceable and a special tool is supplied to facilitate removal, along with a plastic cover to protect the stylus when not in use.

Performance:- All test measurements, and most of my listening, were carried out with the Prestige Black mounted on my reference SME Series V pickup arm but I also used the cartridge for a while as part of my review procedures on the Thorens TD146 MkVI turntable.

The recommended tracking force of 1.5g gave optimum 80/80 tracking as measured on the Ortofon TC 3000 computer testset and I saw no reason to experiment with an even lower playing weight in search of a, probably illusory, reduction in record or stylus wear. In fact no trace of mistracking occurred during extended listening tests with quite fiercely modulated LPs. Channel balance was precise, with both L/R outputs measuring 3.50mV, and channel separation was better than the specification at 25dB. Frequency response showed a slight dip in the region of 5kHz, which is typical of this type of cartridge, but climbed back to +2dB at 20kHz and held up for another ultrasonic octave beyond that.

Using a wide selection of favorite and technically demanding LPs, [I rated this cartridge highly on all the important subjective sound quality criteria. With the stable tracking already mentioned, there was also a lack of any tendency to emphasize record surface noise.](#) Heavy musical climaxes were handled well and quiet passages remained

clear and interference-free. Extreme treble can often be an achilles heel for pick-up cartridges, but was enough smooth extension to provide natural string tone and sharp percussive effects. There was just a little loss of presence on voices and solo instruments and some bias in favor of the bottom half of the spectrum. Thus bass was particularly impressive in music where it matters most.

Pulling out that old audiophile favorite LP Cantate Domino (proprius PRO7762) with its impressive organ, trumpets, solo and choral voices in a heavenly church acoustic produced a spectacular effect. The less dynamically demanding Stille nacht track remains one of my tests for definition and spatial realism. This cartridge rose to the challenge with very little muddling of detail. The Mobile Fidelity Sound Lab audiophile remastering of Sir Georg Solti's 1978 Decca recording of Holst's The Planets(MFSL 1-510)explores the full gamut of frequencies , dynamics and ambient depth. The Grado brought out most of the tonal accuracy and excitement and though I have heard it better reproduced, that was only with cartridges costing about 10 times the price.

[This Grado cartridge has proved itself to be good-natured in its easy matching to turntables and amplifiers, robust, an excellent tracker and easy on the ear. It is a welcome addition to the dwindling market of budget replacement cartridges.](#)

HI-FI CHOICE

GRADO

Prestige Gold Phono Cartridge

By Alan Sircom

Odd man out in this collection of moving coils is the Grado Prestige Gold. Way back in the '70s, the first cartridge that I ever purchased for a decent turntable was a Grado. I can't remember which model it was but I do recall that it was unusual: its removable stylus was stuck in place with a black goo, an arrangement I'd not seen before and haven't since. It also came with a peculiar tool for removing said stylus. Both items feature in the Prestige Gold.

Anyway, enough of the nostalgia. The Grado design derives from the moving iron principle and incorporates Grado's Flux Bridger generator system, in which the cantilever bridges four separate magnetic gaps. This system requires fewer coil turns, which, the company claims, makes Grado's insensitive to tonearm cable capacitance. The Prestige range is designed for 'high output and excellent stability under severe use', and roughly the top ten percent of the highly specified Silver models are selected to get promoted to Prestige Gold league.

I've always found the sound of cartridges other than moving coils to be unrefined by comparison; in particular, the top end of high output designs never quite matches coils for speed, clarity and grace. The Prestige Gold, however, seemed to be sweeter than most. It was lively and detailed but never edgy on vocal sibilants, and didn't over-emphasis leading edges on acoustic guitar. Gold? Smooth? Mellow Yellow!

Mary Coughlan's Tired And Emotional sounded remarkably easy-going. The music's rhythms had an appropriate swagger, her voice was expressive and involving, the presentation's tonal balance seemed even and there was a sense of substance that's often lacking in non-MC's. Seduced demonstrated that Grado's Mellow Yellow could cut it at the low end of the spectrum; Curly Keranen's double bass sounded tuneful and warm but there was a decent snap marking the start of notes. The cartridge also revealed the dynamic aspects of Curly's playing, the way he choked some notes more than others and gradation in those he hit harder and let ring.

Beefheart's Clear Spot, the undoing of many an under-performing cartridges, didn't faze the Grado. In fact, the Prestige Gold seemed to appreciate the Magic Band's temporal liberty-taking. It kept things coherent and shoved them along at a fittingly brisk pace. Although not as scrupulously detailed as the best moving coils here, [it still wrested plenty of information from the groove and dug down into the music's fabric to unearth its character and gestalt.](#) It also imparted a proper feel to the music; Too Much Time, for instance, had just the lazy, funky propulsion that's needed to set feet tapping. It's a definite Best Buy!

The Grado's presentation was extremely easy to live with and comfortably communicative. It didn't ram feisty music in my face but maintained it's lively character. For that reason alone, the Grado will probably gel in a great many systems. [The Grado holds its head up in more expensive company, it's a definite Best Buy.](#)