

Austrian Audio Hi-X65 Professional Open-Back Over-Ear Headphones

A new open-back model joins this popular Austrian headphone family

REVIEW BY ALEX HAWLEY

Austrian Audio has added to its Hi-X series of professional headphones with the Hi-X65. I recently reviewed both of its predecessors favorably; each has its own distinct sound. The Hi-X50 (reviewed January 2021) is a closed-back, on-ear design that sounds mid-forward with a very controlled bottom end. The Hi-X55 (reviewed May 2020) is a closed-back, over-ear design with a much brighter and open-sounding tonality. Both have a very rugged build as well as a comfortable fit. With this variety of sounds already in the Hi-X family, I was very curious to get my hands on the new Hi-X65 to hear where it lands in comparison. I've spent the last month using these headphones daily, mainly in the context of mixing and critical listening.

Overview

The new Hi-X65 is made in Austria and, unlike the other Hi-X models, features an open-back (over-ear) design. They're built for detailed and precise listening for mixing and mastering purposes. All three Hi-X models utilize the same high excursion drivers, but what's interesting is, Austrian Audio notes the drivers were first designed with open headphones in mind. So, the Hi-X65 represents perhaps the most optimal integration of Austrian Audio high excursion drivers yet.

The drivers are built around a ring magnet system that resembles a loudspeaker design (not typical for headphone drivers). This system is paired with a copper-clad aluminum voice coil

to reduce the membrane's weight and allow for a more dynamic reproduction. The design eliminates any 'wobbling' of the diaphragm, reducing unwanted resonance; the result is a 44mm driver that is fast, accurate, and can move twice as much air as standard driver designs. The frequency response is listed as 5 Hz – 28 kHz, with an impedance of 25 ohms. It comes with two detachable 1/8" cables (4', 10'), a 1/4" adapter, and a soft bag for storage or travel.

Build

When I reviewed the Hi-X55, I was quite impressed by its balance between comfort and strength. They remain one of the most comfortable (and durable) headphones I have reviewed to date.

Luckily, the new Hi-X65 shares the same build and comfort as its over-ear sibling. The ear cups are made out of super-soft, low-retaining foam that conforms to the shape of your head. The pads are large enough to fully enclose the ears without putting any pressure directly on them, which is helpful to stay comfortable during long mixing sessions. While the ears feel roomy inside the pads, it still creates a snug, even seal on your head, which helps with reducing some external noises despite its open design. The headband is padded with the same low-retaining foam and is evenly balanced to keep pressure points off the top of the head. The only downside to its plush padding is heat; my ears have gotten a bit toasty during marathon sessions where I have needed to take them off for some time to cool down. All the foam is removable for easy cleaning.

The build quality is excellent, as we've come to expect from Austrian Audio. All critical components, such as the hinges

and the headband, are made out of metal. The Hi-X65 is every bit as tough as its siblings, which are built to withstand some abuse. It also stands up against smudges and fingerprints, keeping the whole unit looking and feeling clean over time.

In my Hi-X50 review, I told the story of my 2020 NAMM interaction with Martin Seidl, CEO of Austrian Audio. Martin twisted, mangled, bent, and pulled his headphones in shocking ways that would have snapped just about any other headphone on the market. It got my heart rate going—great demo!

Sound

Hi-X65 is balanced and open sounding, with an impressively punchy and tight bottom end. There was an immediate familiarity when I pulled up some initial reference mixes: accurate and clear while sounding lively and exciting at the same time. This isn't an easy balance to achieve; accuracy-focused headphones and speakers always run the risk of sounding a bit stiff or sterile for general listening purposes, but that isn't the

case with Hi-X65. If there's energy in the track, these headphones will translate it with some punch to go with it.

An airy presence in the 8-10 kHz range provides detail in the upper end of vocals, hi-hats and snare drums. It accomplishes this while sounding smooth and natural, and not overly emphasized or bright. Until I got used to where that range should sit, I had a tendency to under-mix the sibilance range on some vocalists, but it didn't take long to adjust. The midrange is clean without any noticeable peaks or dips; if anything, the mids are *slightly* pulled back on the whole, but not in a way that impedes confident mixing. The bottom end is again punchy and tight, with a far-reaching response that remains clean down to the subharmonics—great with modern hip-hop and pop mixes.

The soundstage is wide and deep with precise imaging; something I enjoyed with the Hi-X55 as well, but perhaps even more so with the Hi-X65. Stereo placement feels spacious and enveloping, especially with well-mixed material.

Final Thoughts

To me, the Hi-X65 is a cut above its predecessors in terms of high-fidelity performance. The sound is very well balanced for mixing and mastering; my mixes translated as expected. I love the open design (though probably not ideal for tracking)—ideal for revealing while mixing, and enjoyable for casual listening as well. The Hi-X65 is somewhat forgiving, but still revealing enough to make you work hard for your mixes. The tight bottom end brings energy and excitement in a way that feels relatable for other playback systems.

The comfort and build quality are also highlights. The metal hinges and headband make it durable, and the soft foam makes it comfortable. If you need a closed-back design, the Hi-X55 offers a similar response, but overall, the Hi-X65 provides a more accurate and musical response with its open design. An impressive addition from Austrian Audio! ➡

Price: \$429

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