

Cutting the Cord From Your iPod

New Wireless Headphones For Apple's Music Player Sound Good, but Feel Clunky

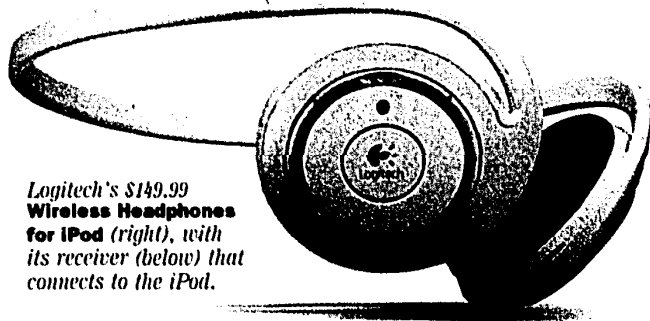
IN ANY MAJOR CITY, it's not uncommon to find many people walking the streets or riding the subway system with the same accessories dangling from their ears: the signature white headphone wires of an iPod. These wires connect Apple Computer's iPod music players to its popular earbuds, and they've become a fashion statement all their own.

THE MOSSBERG SOLUTION

By Walter S. Mossberg

But these wires aren't just making a statement to techie trendsetters. Thieves have picked up on the fact that these white eye-catchers are attached to an iPod that costs anywhere from \$99 to \$449. New York City police have even attributed a recent rise in robberies on subways in part to iPod theft, noting that the white headphone wires are a major lure.

Today, Logitech International is introducing a new product that will eliminate the wires between your ears and your iPod, but it might not necessarily be less noticeable than white wires. The compa-



*Logitech's \$149.99
Wireless Headphones
for iPod (right), with
its receiver (below) that
connects to the iPod.*



ny's \$150 Wireless Headphones for iPod work using Bluetooth, a short-range radio technology that lets the iPod stream music to the headphones over the air, and allows the headphones to control song playback.

Such wireless headphones have long been a dream of hard-core iPod fanatics. And this product is one of the first of what could be a flood of wireless headphones for the iPod and other mu-

sic devices, especially as the headphones' prices and sizes decrease. Last year, Hewlett-Packard introduced its own \$100 Bluetooth Stereo Headphones for its iPAQ PDA, which also plays music, and TEN Technology sells a \$140 Bluetooth adapter for the iPod that enables HP's wireless headphones to work with Apple's player.

My assistant Katie Boehret and I have been testing Logitech's new wireless headphones with a \$299 20-gigabyte iPod and a \$199

four-gigabyte iPod Mini (any iPod with a dock connector will work) to see how they work. We paid special attention to ease of use—after all, they're still just headphones and shouldn't be complicated. We also noted how comfortable they were. Consumers often buy alternate headphones for their iPods instead of using Apple's standard white earbuds because the latter are uncomfortable after long-term use.

Overall, we found the Logitech headphones to be a mixed bag. Though they worked and allowed us more freedom when using the iPods, they were too expensive and, worse, they were bulky and

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Wireless Headphones for iPods

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uncomfortable.

The headphones themselves consist of two ear-covering, circular pieces that connect via a plastic band that wraps around the back of your head. The right earpiece has volume and playback controls for the iPod built onto it, positioned in a circular pattern similar to the buttons on an iPod wheel.

Two additional components come with the headphones and are necessary to use them: a Bluetooth receiver that attaches to the top of your iPod and a power adapter for charging the receiver's and headphones' internal batteries. Before testing, we charged the headphones and receiver by attaching them to the power adapter; both displayed an orange glowing light until charged, then the light went out. Logitech says one charge will last for eight hours; we got to nine hours before hitting an empty tank.

Most Bluetooth devices that we've used in the past required us to go through an arduously annoying "pairing" process, during which the Bluetooth receiver must find and recognize the device that it's trying to "pair" with it. This process often involves entering a four-digit password on one or both devices and crossing your fingers in hopes that it will work.

We were pleasantly surprised that these headphones come pre-paired with their corresponding Bluetooth receiver, which makes setup as easy as turning on the two devices.

The white, rectangular receiver snaps into the headphone jack of an iPod. Our iPods turned on automatically when the receiver was inserted into each, in turn, and a light on the receiver blinked red, meaning it's on but not connected to a Bluetooth device. (You can turn the iPod back off with the receiver still attached to save the battery when not in use.)

We pressed the center button on the headphones' right earpiece. A small light on the earpiece started blinking blue, and the receiver's light did the same, then turned solid blue, indicating that the two were paired. We pressed the cen-

ter button on our headset again to play music, used two buttons to skip ahead and back through songs and pressed plus and minus buttons to adjust volume.

We donned the headphones, and our music sounded just like it would on wired headphones—various genres ranging from classical to country to rock were perfectly audible. It took only a few minutes to remember where each button was located on the earpiece without looking. Soon, we were up and walking around the office, enjoying our wire-free listening. Katie wandered about 15 feet from her iPod into my office—around a corner and through two doors—without losing the sound. She then wandered about another 15 feet farther down the hall to test the Bluetooth's 30-foot range, which proved accurate. Just slightly beyond 30 feet, the music started to skip and sound shaky, but up until then, it still sounded fine.

But we were very disappointed by the discomfort of the headphones. They weigh only 3.2 ounces, but due to the behind-the-head design, each earpiece seemed very heavy. If the plastic connecting piece had been designed to go over the top of your head, it would have balanced the weight on each ear. Also, the headpiece doesn't adjust to become smaller or larger. With the loose fit and the weight, the headphones kept sliding off when we walked briskly or jogged. Katie could barely keep the Wireless Headphones on for 45 minutes before taking them off because they were so uncomfortable.

The idea of using wireless headphones is a good one, and the Bluetooth connection worked as advertised. But we can't justify the \$150 price tag—almost as much as the low-end iPod mini—and the discomfort that come along with Logitech's Wireless Headphones. We expect that other companies will introduce more comfortable wireless headphones so that all of us can eventually ditch our dangling ear accessories. But for now, keep detangling those wires until a better product comes along.

—With reporting by Katherine Boehret

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