

Sennheiser NoiseGard PXC 250 Headphones

Report by Ann Perry, B&DTG assisted by David Dyer

Sennheiser is a long established and highly regarded manufacturer of genuinely hi-fi quality headphones.

The subject of this report is unusual in that it has been produced, not only to function as a conventional headphone for use with domestic hi-fi systems, but also as a lightweight and readily portable device for use when travelling, incorporating the added advantage of the *NoiseGard* system for the reduction of ambient noise. The *NoiseGard* device is powered by a small plastic module containing two AAA batteries which last for up to 80 hours, and is attached to the lead of the headphones.

This clever technology works by using built-in microphones inside each earpiece to measure the ambient noise of an environment, and it then generates an equivalent out of phase signal to have a cancelling effect on frequencies between 100-400 Hz within that noise. The battery module is fitted with a switch so that it can be turned off if not required, leaving the headphones to function independently.

The headphones themselves have soft pads which fit over the ears and, although with *NoiseGard* activated unwanted sounds are suppressed, normal conversation can still be readily heard, so there is not the sense of isolation felt when using sealed headphones to restrict extraneous noise.

They are provided with universal connectors enabling their use either with domestic hi-fi equipment or an external source such as a Walkman or in-flight entertainment system. Importantly, the *NoiseGard* module can be used without an external music source, simply for its noise suppression capability.

Presumably intended for travellers with normal hearing, my interest in this product was raised by a review in the May edition of Hi-Fi News, which was spotted by a friend who has a keen interest in recorded music and is a subscriber to the magazine. Although the author of the feature had concentrated mainly on their performance when travelling by air, my friend realised that their usefulness could extend to a far wider range of applications, being aware that as a tinnitus sufferer, ambient noise is an almost constant and very unwelcome companion wherever I am.

Having confirmed my interest he then approached his favoured hi-fi dealer, the Solihull branch of **Music Matters**, of whom he has been a highly satisfied customer for many years, and David Clifford at **Music Matters** kindly agreed to obtain a pair of the headphones from *Sennheiser* for extended evaluation.

Now, as most of us know, tinnitus is a very individual beast, and its effect can vary considerably from one sufferer to another, particularly if other hearing impairments are present. What follows therefore are my own specific experiences which other sufferers would need to verify for themselves.

While performing the tests I did not use other hearing aids.

Situations tested Results

- Around the house with personal radio connected to headphones *Background noises gone*
- A fan oven, with NoiseGard only *Noise almost gone*
- Vacuum cleaner, with NoiseGard only *Noise reduced by half*
- In a small car with personal radio *Engine noise almost gone. Radio clearer.*
- In a diesel powered car with personal radio *Noise reduced by at least half. Radio clearer.*
- Against high volume music with NoiseGard only *Sound reduced by approximately half to a far more comfortable level*
- I could hear normal conversation in all these situations.

For a second opinion I also asked our Chairman to test these headphones, and in noisy domestic situations he experienced the same, similar, or in some cases better results than I had. Being the purist that he is, he did express a preference for his own headphones when listening to music in a quiet situation. This is not unreasonable as, clearly, when assessed solely on sound quality against similarly priced conventional headphones, not least those from *Sennheiser* themselves, the PXC 250s will be outperformed, because of the additional cost of providing the *NoiseGard* facility. However we are both confident from our experiences that

the PXC 250s could be helpful to many tinnitus and hearing impaired sufferers who constantly battle with background noise.

For more information please contact *Music Matters* to whom we express our sincere thanks for their kind assistance. They can be found at:

Music Matters

93-95 Hobsmoat Rd., Solihull. West Midlands. Tel: 0121 742 0254

Other branches are at : 363, Hagley Rd., Edgbaston, 0121 429 2811

9, Market St., Stourbridge, 01384 444184

10, Boldmere Rd., Sutton Coldfield, 0121 354 2311

Grateful thanks are also due to Sennheiser for their vision in producing a thoroughly useful product, and for their loan of the pair reviewed.

Sennheiser NoiseGard PXC250 noise-cancelling headphones

Sennheiser NoiseGard PXC150 noise-cancelling headphones *"Best buy" in RNID test results*

Sennheiser NoiseGard PXC350 noise-cancelling headphones *"Recommended but expensive" - RNID*

Shop around for competitive quotes.

Reviewed December 2009