

Optoma NuForce BE6 review: Bluetooth earbuds worth buying



These new aluminium wire-free headphones sound better than most. Linked by a subtle cable, they clip to each other magnetically – but battery life could be better



Optoma NuForce BE6 are the latest pair of Bluetooth earbuds hoping to set users free of cables. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs for the Guardian

Samuel Gibbs

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Bluetooth earbuds offer the holy grail of wire-free listening without the bulk of headphones. Optoma's new NuForce BE6 promise better sound and a premium aluminium design, but are they worth the extra cost over cheaper rivals?

The NuForce BE6 are about as simple and understated as Bluetooth earbuds can get.

The two aluminium bodies with small, embossed logos in their ends are linked by a flat, two-tone grey cable with an in-line remote on one side. A small blue light flashes periodically on the remote to tell you they're on, turning off or have been put into pairing mode.



The ends are magnetic and attach to each other to stop the cable getting tangled. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs for the Guardian

The three-button remote hides the microUSB charging port and a small pin-hole microphone for using the earphones as a phone headset. The buttons are a bit rubbery and have some play to them, but work fine for controlling playback or changing the volume. Pressing all three at once flashes the LED to show remaining charge.

The microphone was a bit quiet in my testing, meaning I had to shout a bit louder than I would have liked for the other end of my conversation to be heard.

The headphones clip together, magnetically back-to-back, which stops the cable tangling up and can stop them flying off your shoulders when they're being worn but not listened to.

Wearing



Some will need the optional stabiliser to keep them in their ears, particularly while running. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs for the Guardian

A range of earbuds come with the headphones to suit earholes of various sizes. There's an optional loop that holds it in place, wedging up against the antihelix within the outer ear, but I didn't need it as they stayed in place fine with just some silicon earbuds.

The body of each earphone is quite large and rubbed against my outer ear, which became uncomfortable with prolonged wearing. Most earbuds suffer from similar problems, but I found the BE6 to be particularly uncomfortable for a week or so until I got used to them.

Pairing them is simple. Hold down the centre remote button to power them on and keep it held down until a tone sounds and the light flashes, then find them in your device's settings.

Listening

Bluetooth earbuds this size typically sound as good as a pair of wired earbuds half their price. The BE6 support both [apt-X](#) and AAC codecs along with all standard Bluetooth streaming protocols and sound better than most, similar to a pair of £50-to-£60 wired earbuds. The rest you pay for the convenience of being wire-free (apart from the wire connecting the two earbuds).

They have good detail and separation, relatively accurate highs and more bass than the Plantronics BackBeat Go, though people looking for thundering bass should look elsewhere. They are not going to blow you away if you're used to listening to high-end earbuds or some good headphones, but are the best sounding in-ear Bluetooth headphones I have listened to yet.

Charging

The NuForce BE6 lasted around five hours of listening between charges connected to a smartphone. That isn't quite long enough to not have to worry about whether they are powered up or not, but will see most people through at least half their commutes for the week. They beep a couple of times around 10 minutes before dying. Charging took over two hours.

The headphones can connect to more than one device at a time, which is handy, and connection strength to a smartphone in a jeans pocket was generally good. Only occasionally did I notice interference, typically because of a smartwatch getting in between the smartphone and the earphones.





A good selection of silicone and foam earbuds are included in the box, but the relatively thick central tube may not fit some. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs for the Guardian

Price

The Optoma NuForce BE6 are some of the more expensive in-ear Bluetooth headphones available costing £100 in grey or white and gold, and come with a nylon carry case and a selection of earbuds.

For comparison, the Plantronics BackBeat Go 2s cost under £60 while Apple's Powerbeats 2 cost £170.

Verdict

The Optoma NuForce BE6 are some of the best Bluetooth in-ear headphones I have listened to, but they are not faultless.

They're not the most comfortable, they're still relatively bulky compared to wired earphones and only lasting about five hours between two-hour charges can get annoying. But they are compromises to free yourself of wires to your phone or computer.

The biggest problem is that they do not sound anywhere near as good as a £100 pair of wired headphones. As long as you realise that you're paying £30 to £50 for the wire-free experience, they're worth the money.

Once you use Bluetooth headphones you're unlikely to want to go back to being tethered to a smartphone in your pocket.

Pros: *light, attractive, good sound, cable between buds doesn't make noise when caught on clothes, magnetic*

Cons: *only last five hours, take over two hours to charge, not the most comfortable, thick buds may not suit some*

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