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Personal technology

TECH REVIEW

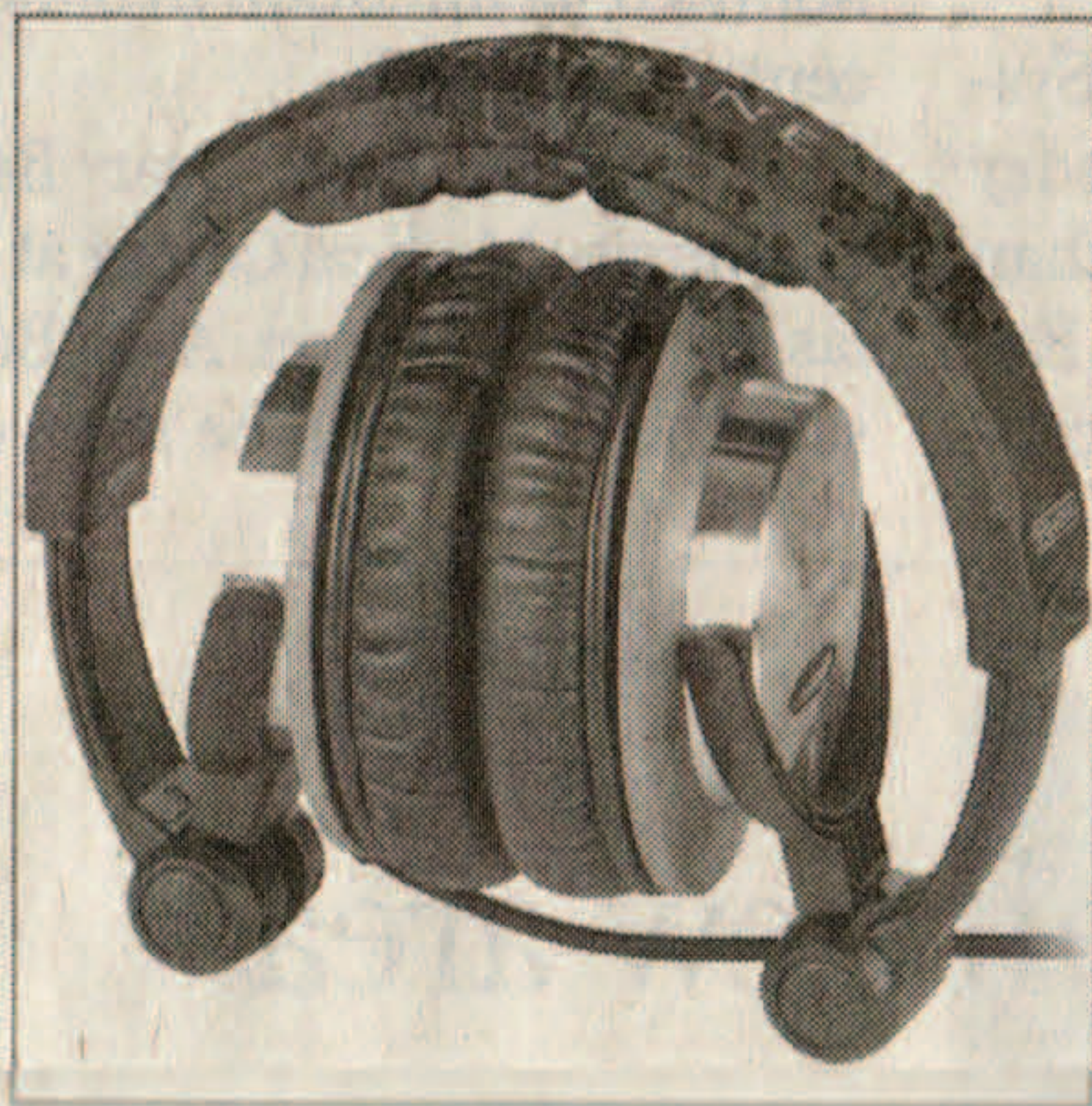
3 things to like

Folding headphones, a cheap MP3 player and a gripping bag

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Ultrason HFI-680 foldable headphones

Reviewing headphones is easy — just listen to some music and write about how they sound.

But what sounds good to me might not sound so good to you.

I've been testing a set of Ultrason HFI-680 foldable, over-the-ear headphones, and I really like what I hear.

I could take up this entire space touting features such as S-Logic Natural Surround Sound Plus or MU Metal shielding, but every company has its own buzzwords and terms for its components.

The HFI-680 (www.ultrason.com) is a good-looking, comfortable set of full-size headphones that folds for easy storage and travel. They sound very rich.

My "at-work" headphones are from Sennheiser (HD 280 Pro, \$95), and I thought they were pretty darn good.

But the Ultrasones have much deeper, fuller sound — especially on the low end. There seems to be a much broader range to the music.

Ultrason says these phones reduce sound pressure up to 40 percent, cutting the risk of damage to your hearing.

Now I'd expect \$200 headphones to sound better than a \$100 pair, so your budget probably has much to do with your decision.

If the HFI-680s are in your price range, you'll probably be quite happy with your choice.

Price: \$219
Pros: Great sound, long cord, comfortable
Cons: No noise canceling, slightly expensive
Bottom line: Great-sounding cans



Sansa Clip+ MP3 player

While all the news media went to Apple's recent announcement of a new iPod Shuffle, Sandisk has been quietly producing great little music players as well.

One of its newest is the Sansa Clip+ (www.sandisk.com), which has a wider range of sizes for much less money.

The Clip+ is the size of a Zippo lighter.

It comes in 2-, 4- and 8-gigabyte sizes for \$40, \$50 and \$70.

So what does that get you?

■ A very nice-sounding MP3 player with a clip to make it wearable.

■ A 1-inch OLED screen with a very simple interface and actual navigation buttons.

■ An FM tuner with 40 presets.

■ A built-in microphone for voice recording.

■ A micro SD card slot for increased storage.

■ A rechargeable battery with 15 hours of playback time.

The Clip+ works with the Rhapsody, Napster and eMusic services. My DRM-free iTunes music was easily transferred over, but the Clip+ does not appear when you open the iTunes software on your computer.

The player appeared on my Mac desktop like a hard drive. Copying my tunes to the Music folder was a snap.

Dollar for dollar, the Sansa Clip+ blows the Shuffle away in every area but size.

I'll take the extra features over the small size any day.

Price: \$40 to \$70, depending on storage
Pros: Inexpensive, full-featured, expandable
Cons: Not iTunes-compatible
Bottom line: Cheap enough to give to your kids, full-featured enough to keep for yourself



Grid-It computer bag

Some computer bags are soft-sided, some are hard-shelled. But most are largely the same.

Every bag has a nice spot for your laptop, but what about all those cables and accessories?

Most bags would have you throw them in a big pocket.

Cocoon Innovations' line (cocooninnovations.com) stands out because its Grid-It organization system — a solid surface with a weave of rubberized elastic bands — holds on to the little things you need to carry.

Simply slide your phone and charger, external hard drive and USB cables under the bands, and they'll stay secured.

In the 15-inch laptop case I've been carrying, the bands work well to keep my stuff from becoming disorganized in the bag. And the back of the Grid-It board is covered with a velour fabric to protect the laptop. There is also a removable shoulder strap.

The sides of the case are molded plastic covered with neoprene-like fabric, and there are rubber pads inside to keep the laptop in place. The case comes in seven colors.

Overall, the case offers good protection, and because of Grid-It, there are no exterior pockets.

Price: \$69.99
Pros: Solidly built, Grid-It keeps smaller items in place.
Cons: None
Bottom line: A unique solution for computer bag organization