



ADL H128

Much to the disappointment of today's music producers, composers and arrangers, the current generation of music listeners seem perfectly happy listening to over-compressed, washed-out versions of their songs through crappy computer speakers, budget desktop audio systems and cheap Asian knock-offs of popular headphone brands.

It would seem that the practice of merely possessing a big music collection seems to override the quality of the thing you possess. But that sounds just right for where we are as a species right now.

Midway through last year I was introduced to the sister company of Tokyo-based Furutech, ADL (Alpha Design Labs). This rather innovative company produces audio components specifically for computer-based systems and portable devices.

Not only did that appeal to me for the simple reason that I'm surrounded by modern, digital tech, but the design of their products was right up my alley.

This time around I was presented with the combo of their second-generation GT40 Alpha USB DAC with phono stage, together with what I can confidently say are the most beautiful pair of headphones to ever grace my head – the ADL H128s.

It was love at first sight unwrapping the H128s. The silver and brown colour-scheme is a gorgeous mixture of retro and modern concepts that come together perfectly to achieve a combination of new-world efficiency and old-world charm.

They also come in a choice of either silver/black or dark blue, which would probably give them a more modern feel, but personally I favoured the look of the pair supplied.

The H128s feel very solid to the touch, while closer inspection revealed their almost faultless build-quality. They're a dynamic closed-back circumaural design with swivelling ear cups to ensure a tight, well-sealed fit for most head sizes, while the generous leather padding on both the headband and ear cups ensures high levels of comfort.

The specialised triangular shape of the ear cups, which ADL calls "Alpha Triform Contour" are specifically designed for a superior seal over your ears, which is said

to improve bass response while reducing internal standing waves and reflections for reduced distortion.

The high noise attenuation, low-distortion diaphragms are driven by extra-large, high-resolution, high-flux 40 mm neodymium magnets, which are fitted with alignment rings to help guarantee phase coherence at ultra-high frequencies.

The H128's metal parts on the drivers have also been specially treated by ADL's low-temperature, two-stage cryogenic and anti-magnetic process that the company calls "Alpha Process".

But none of these tech details are evident from the outside and what really lets you know you have something different and special, besides those stunning good looks, is the rhodium-plated mini XLR socket, which is quite rare, even among top headphone manufacturers.

At the time of this review I had just loaded a new hard drive with a massive collection of movies, television shows and music, so I was perfectly prepared to put the H128s through their paces.

I was in the middle of a big *Star Wars* marathon so for a warm-up, I gave them *Revenge of The Sith* to chew on before getting into some of my albums. Movies were a real 'ear' opener! It was almost as if I was watching my favourite films for the first time.

The H128s are tonally rich, and saturated with a level of detail I've never been privy to before. Voices displayed timbre and nuances I had missed all these years, and soundtracks were rendered with unbelievable separation between instruments.

Special effects sounded confident and purposeful, and I felt immersed in the action and emotion of the cinematic narratives like never before.

Music was delivered with amazing soundstaging and the tonal balance of the H128s was impeccable. Again, there was a richness and fullness to these headphones that'll completely consume you.

Turn up the volume and the music is delivered smoothly and effortlessly, but with a definite punch to get – and keep – you excited. It's almost as good as having the band in the room with you!



I can't say anything bad about the H128s except for a slightly tight fit on my head that was a bit uncomfortable when wearing spectacles. But the more I wore them, the more they moulded themselves to the shape of my head.

I'm sure by now, you've seen the price tag, but before you have a coronary, let me tell you that from my perspective, they're so worth it.

Justin Beachcroft-Shaw

VITAL STATS

Design	Dynamic, closed back
Drivers.....	40 mm transducers, special high-flux magnet
Sensitivity ...	98 dB SPL (1 mW @ 1 kHz)
Frequency response	20 Hz – 20 kHz
Input power	200 mW (max)
Rated Impedance.....	68 ohms @ 1 kHz
Connector	Non-magnetic rhodium-plated stereo Alpha mini-XLR socket
Weight.....	280 g
Price	R5 150

Verdict

Beautiful, talented and worth the asking price.

Supplied by

AVCables cc
082 774-4831

e-Mail

sales@avcables.co.za

Website

www.avcables.co.za

OUR RATING: 91 / 100

