

## ADL H128



I wonder how long the hunger for headphones will last? Looking at the rapid development of this segment of the audio market from a consumer's perspective we can only enjoy it. Competition is increasing and manufacturers have to really try if they want to get the attention of a potential customer. We must admit that headphones are a convenient solution for people who want to enjoy music at the highest level, but don't have the conditions for a classic home set. Or they demand mobility, which is very likely due to the parallel development of portable DAP players. Price is yet another factor. Headphones and dedicated amplifier costs a few thousand euros, but it can give better sound performance than a set of speakers and classic amplifier at the same price.

When we pay several hundred euros for a set of speakers, we have no other choice but budget products. Allocating the same amount on headphones, we are talking about decent, medium priced equipment. The H128 headphones by Alpha Design Labs are an interesting representative. ADL is part of the Furutech company, known in audiophile's world as cable manufacturer. H128 is the top model in ADL's small headphones offer, which includes three other items - on-ear H118 and in-ear EH008.

Would you believe this is a flagship model in ADL's headphone catalogue?

### Design and functionality

Let's face it, at a certain level, some things are just obvious. Headphones of this class are not wrapped in a plastic blister pack, in which the only accessory is the instruction manual in Chinese. We get ADL H128 in a rectangular box where we find handy zipper case holding headphones, two



cables and a 3.5 to 6.3 mm jack adapter. Of course, besides there are leaflets and instructions warning about rotating earpads inside, which may damage the product.

What is H128? Lightweight and well made, and additionally pretty nice. There are three color versions - silver/bronze, silver/black and dark blue. I got this first one, probably the nicest. Color scheme means the use of silver pads and parts of the headband. Brown skin leatherette was used for the edging of sponges and the flexible elements of the headband. According to me, it simply means eco leather, but I can be wrong. The pads are made of solid plastic and rotate only outside, but it's perfectly adequate for proper alignment of headphones on our head. The connecting headband is made from a piece of solid metal, as are elements governing its length. The length adjustment is noticeable by jumps and some resistance, so you can be sure that just one setting is enough, and careless hand movement will not change it. Headphones hold steady after putting them on the head thanks to apparent pressure, but spending a few hours in them isn't tiring. The shape of the pads, which is called Alpha TriForma Contour, is an interesting solution. The pads have a triangular shape, which aims to

provide a better fit to the pinna and reduce internal distortion and noise. Because of this unusual solution it's difficult to specify the type of these headphones. Owners of small earlobes define them as over-ear, and others as on-ear headphones. In my case, the ears are located inside the pad, although when putting them on I need to spend a moment at the appropriate arrangement of pads, so that long listening doesn't cause discomfort.

It is worth to write a few words about wiring used to power the drivers. It is made entirely by Furutech. All the internal wiring is done by Pro OCC cables. Headphone signal is supplied by a mini-XLR connector placed on the left pad. As I mentioned earlier, we receive two cables - one with a length of 3 meters, the second, 130-cm cable is made of Alpha OCC and finished with rhodium plated Furutech plugs. Beautiful thing. I wonder whether the performance would be as beautiful as this.



XLR socket looks very professional.

Sound performance

Probably many of you have encountered a situation when on one hand the newly purchased record doesn't impress at all, but on the other there is something that makes us listen to it a few times. Only after some time communing with its contents we discover the deep hidden value, and the album doesn't allow itself to be forgotten for weeks. I had similar feelings

when I tried the H128 for the first time. At first they didn't impress me with their performance, but there was something about them that made me spend in their company next few days. After this time I managed to know all the advantages of Alpha Design Labs' flagship product. Do you think now that I got used to their sound after that time? Oh, believe me - it's not like that. I have to admit that sound of these headphones is not suitable for everyone's taste (they have their own way of playing), but rejecting them after first few minutes might be a mistake. They convinced me with a strong, harmonious and - what is most important - differentiated bass. The middle part of the band complements this range. Although it's slightly withdrawn and a little in the shadow of the bass, it doesn't seem to be deficient. I can say the same about the treble - it doesn't stab in the ears, it isn't tiring, but allows for long listening sessions. Music is distinguished by warm sound temperature, but without wooly coating. Slightly rounded tone is nevertheless springy resilient and strong, suited for rock music.

Even though the headphones are equipped as standard with a small jack, which discloses their mobile nature, they require a good headphone amplifier. Only then will they show all their unquestionable strong points. Their size in fact already suggests a rather domestic use, although seeing how big headphones are worn by young people on the streets, it's harder to talk about the headphones typically for home use.

The soundstage created by these headphones is linked to their type - this is a closed-back model, so music doesn't reverberate to the sides, creating a vast spectacle. It rather sits in the middle of the head and is distributed deeply, forming an interesting, three-dimensional message. And this is precisely what enchanted me most in ADL's performance and caused me to spend more time with them. Maybe they will impress you either? H128 are really worth giving them some time. It may turn out that this is a beginning of a new friendship.

Am I the only one who sees a ballerina's shoe here?



Build quality and technical parameters

H128 ADL are closed-back, dynamic, over-ear headphones (or on-ear - it depends on what size your earlobes are), which use 40-mm drivers with High Flux magnet. Rated impedance is 68 ohms, and maximum input power is 200 mW. Frequency response is measured at 20 Hz - 20 kHz.



The headband is made of metal really - it's just covered with plastic from the outside.

System configuration

Audiolab 8200CDQ, Edgar SH-1, Thorens TD166J, Ultrasono PROLine 2500.

The shape of earpads looks a bit unusual but they are actually very comfortable.



#### Verdict

My evaluation of these headphones has strongly evolved with the passing time. At the beginning it was hard for me to get used to them, and a few days later it was hard for me to take them off. That sound is really absorbing. H128 have their own way of presenting music. Probably not everyone will like it, but those who give them a chance will spend a lot of really beautiful moments with their favourite music.



The whole set with a hard case.

Technical data

Acoustic design: dynamic closed-back  
Frequency response: 20 Hz - 20 kHz  
Impedance: 68  $\Omega$   
Driver: 40 mm special high-flux magnet  
Cable length: 3 m, 1.3 m  
Jack type: 3.5 mm  
Price: €399  
Manufacturer: ADL

## Sound performance



## Editor's rating

7.4

Overall

6

Sound

8

Functionality

8

Design

7

Quality

8

Price