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ADV

Xtatix Freefone

REVIEW DATE: 12.06.05

It does have quite a few limitations, but given its comfort level and decent sound, we think the Xtatix Freefone makes an excellent gift idea.

✓ Editor's Rating: ●●●○○

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By Michael Kobrin

We're always searching for ways to get music from our pocket to our head without any wires in between. Bluetooth headphones are one solution, though because of the limitations of Bluetooth, we're generally not impressed with the sound quality. Enter wearable MP3 players. We've seen a few of these come and go, most notably the [Oakley Thump](#) and [Thump 2](#). These sound decent, but they're expensive and not always practical. And most headphones that have built-in MP3 players try to do too much, with built-in FM tuners, Bluetooth phone connections, and media slots. Xtatix, a small Buffalo, New York-based company, is selling what we consider a very good solution for exercise nuts who just want to load a bunch of MP3s on some headphones and get running or cycling. The Xtatix Freefone has some limitations, but we feel it's a step in the right direction for wearable technology. It makes a solid, (very) basic 1GB flash-based wearable MP3 player—and it doesn't make you look dorky.

The Freefone fits over your ears with flat foam pads like popular "street-style" headphones, and a hard plastic band clips over the tops of your ears and goes around the back of your neck. These are the lightest MP3 headphones we've seen yet, and the neckband provides very good clamping, so they stay on your head even if you're practicing gymnastics (we did a cartwheel and they didn't budge one bit). We were able to wear them comfortably through a solid hour of cycling, and we took them off afterwards only because they probably wouldn't work too well in the shower.

The controls take a bit of getting used to and could be placed a little better, but at least they're fairly simple. All buttons do double duty depending on

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how long you hold them down: Two buttons on the bottom of the left headphone control track-skip functions if pressed briefly and volume if held for more than half a second. Two buttons on the top control Play/Pause, on/off, equalizer preset options, and repeat (only single-track repeat is available).

To charge the player, you use a USB cable that's reminiscent of the one we saw on the MobiBlu DAH-1500i [MobiBlu DAH-1500i](#): One end is a standard USB plug and the other is a 2.5mm minijack of the type found on cell phone earpieces. (The MobiBlu cable terminates in a 3.5mm jack.) The player doesn't include a separate charger, so you've got to be near a PC to charge it. Loading music on the player is a simple matter of connecting it to any PC or Mac via the USB cable and transferring files via drag-and-drop. The player supports MP3s and unprotected WMA files, and you can store data files on it as well. Unfortunately, you have to have all of your music in one folder, because it can read only from a single folder, and it reads tracks in alphabetical order.

We listened to jazz, pop, rock, and R&B, and although there's not really any deep low bass, the upper bass and highs are strong enough that music doesn't sound muddy or distant. The EQ presets are the usual suspects—Rock, Pop, and Jazz—and are too subtle for noisy environments. But one added benefit of the neckband's strong clamping power is that it actually pushes the speakers closer to your ears, providing better bass response than it would have otherwise. It even blocks a tiny bit of noise, though you can still hear plenty of what's going on around you, so you're less likely to get hit by a car during your morning run. And 6.5 hours of battery life may not seem like much, but if you're working out for longer than that at a stretch, well . . . frankly, we're scared. But that does mean you'll need to plug the Freefone in and let it charge fairly often.

If you want a digital music player that's light, simple, and not terribly expensive for working out (or even commuting), this is certainly one to check out. It does have quite a few limitations, but given its comfort level and decent sound (not to mention the low dorkiness factor), we think the Freefone makes an excellent gift idea. The 1GB version will run you \$149 direct, but the 512MB version is only \$99.

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