

BLUETOOTH

Noise Got You Feeling Blue? Try These Headsets

MORE OFTEN THAN NOT, you probably make your cell phone calls from an environment that's less than ideal, noise-wise. After almost two weeks of trying out three new noise-canceling or -reducing Bluetooth headsets—the Aliph Jawbone, Gennum nX6000, and Plantronics Discovery 655—I'm convinced that using any of these beats the heck out of

trying to hold a conversation with my cell phone up to my ear.

To test how well they worked in noisy areas, I tried the headsets on the sidewalks of medium-busy streets, in stores, in the car, and in a few other spots. I also called my answering machine, to hear how much noise came through.

Aliph's Jawbone would definitely win, with its rectangular shape and striking color mesh, if this were a design contest. It's the largest and heaviest (at 0.5 ounces) of the three. However, the Jawbone's two controls are

The Jawbone is a work of art

hidden under its fancy-design mesh screen; working them takes a little getting to. In order for the noise-canceling feature to work—so the digital signal processor, or DSP, chip can sort your voice out from the noise—a little nub on the Jawbone's underbelly must touch your cheek. Despite nesting into my sideburns, this worked fine for me.

The Jawbone had a couple of advantages over its peers. First, it felt like the least likely to fall off, thanks to its double-loop earpiece. And it had the best noise-canceling abilities of the

three devices. On the other end of the connection, the Jawbone did the best job of filtering out noises other than my voice, my test callers say.

Gennum's nX6000

is the least obtrusive of the three headsets, and it weighs 0.38 ounces. Even though the two microphones in its array are only about half an inch apart, Gennum's custom DSP chip is able to sort out which sounds are coming from the mouth area and filter out most extraneous noise. The control buttons are pleasantly large, making them easy to find and use. My biggest concern with the Gennum is the earpiece, which doesn't feel like it will stay on when, say, I'm running through the airport.

Will the nX6000 hold on?

Sound on both sides of the connection was good most of the time but a little tinny on a few occasions. The device I tested was an advance unit; Gennum expects to ship the nX6000 by the end of this month.

Plantronics' Discovery 655 is a highly usable headset and, at 0.32 ounces, it's the lightest of the three. It has simple controls, including the most convenient main button.

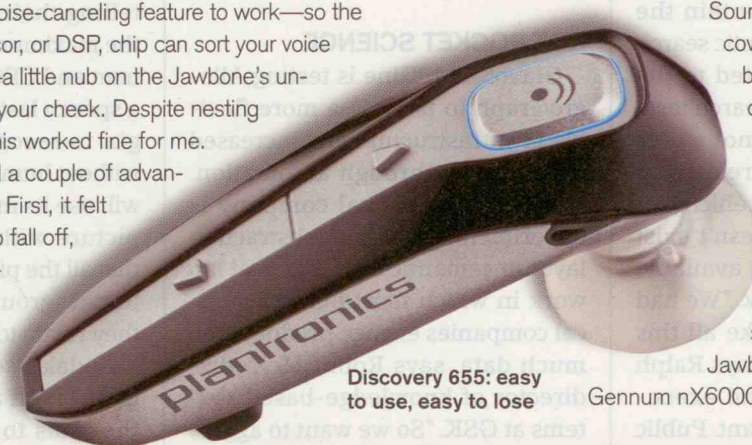
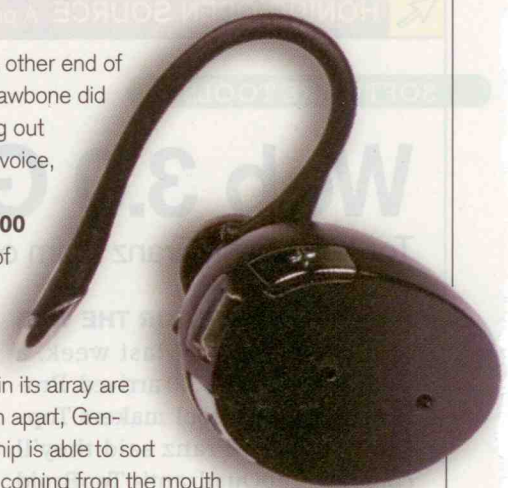
However, the Plantronics ear tip and optional ear loop come off a little too easily, making it easier to lose.

Sound quality on the Discovery was acceptable, but it fell behind the other two. My callers sometimes said that my voice sounded a bit muddy.

My recommendation, if it works with your head/ear shape: The Aliph

Jawbone. If not, try the Gennum nX6000. —DANIEL P. DERN

Discovery 655: easy to use, easy to lose



CLEAR CALLING Lots more on these noise-reducing headsets: informationweek.com/1132/bluetooth.htm