

ERGO A.M.T. Headphones (Alvin Gold hi fi news june 2000)

THE Ergo looks a dead ringer for the Jecklin Float of 1967, and the reason is that it is. But in Ergo colours. The AMT replaces the electrostatic driver from the top Jecklin Float with the Heil Air Motion Transformer .

The transducers are mounted at each end of a thick, moulded plastic band which holds them away from the ears, gently supported at an appropriate distance by foam blocks behind each ear, and resting on the top of the head, again with foam padding to cushion the load. At 650 g, the Ergo AMT is no lightweight. The earpieces are open back, and placement on the head is not critical. The lead consists of 2.5 metres of fairly heavy ribbon cable. Thanks to their loose fitting, no head size adjustment is available or needed. The design doesn't distort the outer ear, which is allowed to function more or less as it would in real life. Nevertheless, the added space has a profound effect on music reproduction, and also on comfort, as air is allowed to flow freely around the ears.

The AMT needs more drive than is available from a headphone socket, and instead uses a connection box for connection to the amplifier speaker terminals, with a single socket which looks rather like a valve base for the headphones, and a rocker switch which directs the input signal to the headphones or to a pair of speakers connected at the rear. The latter can and should be bypassed if you have a separate power amplifier, or if your integrated amp has switching for two sets of speaker terminals.

The headphones are as extraordinary in their way as the speakers, and in some ways perhaps more so.

On more than one occasion, I turned off the speakers I was listening to /not always the Heil models/ and turned up the headphones only to momentarily be fooled into thinking that I had made a mistake, and that I was still listening to the speakers. The big difference to other headphones is that the Ergo provides something like a realistic impression of space and distance. It would be exaggerating to say that the sound wasn't in the head because it wasn't completely true, but certainly the Ergo gets further away from this stereotype than any headphone I have heard apart from the Stax Sigma and, to a lesser extent, the Lambda. In fact imagery appears to be frequency dependent, with lower frequencies sounding significantly more spacious and distant than mid or high frequencies.

The Ergo has what seems to be a house sound, being smooth, warm and open. There was absolutely no trace of aggression or resonance from the drive unit. The structure of the headphone was also above average in this respect at mid and higher frequencies, but there was clearly some coloration from this source in the upper bass and into the midband, a broadband effect I would judge to be centered on the 200-500Hz region, and which a colleague later described as gong-like. The effect was to introduce strong overhang to an otherwise extremely likeable and extremely spacious headphone that for once doesn't image in the head.

This is the only blot on the copybook of an otherwise outstandingly listenable headphone.

You should check it out.