

Sony Fontopia MDR-EX71 Headphones

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Replacement headphones are an absolute must for the PSP. In this guide we explain the criteria you should be looking at when selecting new earphones for your PSP, and the reasons we settled on the fantastic Sony Fontopia MDR-EX71.

There are at least two very good reasons to purchase a new set of headphones

- The supplied set are sound level limited
- The speakers are not loud enough

So whether you are using the bundled headphones or the inbuilt speakers, if there is any background noise at all, the sound output from the PSP suffers very badly.

There are various factors to consider when selecting a new set of headphones so I'll quickly run through those before explaining why we settled on the fantastic Sony MDR-EX71.

Design Elements

This is the most crucial consideration. Headphones come in three basic designs, external, in-ear, and in-ear buds. External earphones which sit on the outside of the ear usually with a large piece of foam padding are no use for the PSP. The volume output from the PSP is quite low meaning you really need to get the output as close to your ear as possible - and that means getting inside the ear.

The in-ear kind that comes with the PSP in the value pack is the next best thing. The problem I have always found with this type though is comfort. I have never found a moulding yet that fits comfortably in the ear and does not cause discomfort after extended use.

Finally we have ear buds. This type fit right inside the canal of the ear. Obviously using this type of earphone takes some responsibility. With the output being so close to the ear drum, it is important to have an awareness of sound levels and treat your ears with respect. That aside, for comfort and clarity of sound you can't beat ear buds, in my experience.

Chord

Some headphone chords have an extremely annoying habit of turning themselves in old style telephone cables, twisting themselves around over and over. This can be a real pain to untie before use every time so it's important to check the cable type. Unfortunately this is not an easy thing to check although some manufacturers do specifically identify non-twisting chords.

Sound Quality

It goes without saying that the quality of sound reproduction is high on the list of requirements for earphones. In order to achieve a decent output I would always recommend sticking with one of the larger manufacturers - which is why I looked at Sony's range and settled on the Sony MDR-EX71.

Sony Fontopia MDR-EX71

One thing the Sony MDR-EX71 is not - is cheap. This is a fairly expensive set of headphones - but they are worth it. Let's see how they fitted our criteria.

Design

The MDRs are ear buds with 3 different sized rubber cups. The medium size fits my ear perfectly, and the other two will be of use to anyone with smaller or larger ears than what Sony have decided is medium. There is a drawing and instructions showing how to swap the rubber cups over, but I am glad mine fit fine, as it looks a bit tricky.

Once the earphones are in place you'll immediately notice how the snug fit cuts out background noise. It's like using a set of industrial strength ear protectors, and I should know as I do on a weekly basis! With the background noise cut out, you already have a head start on hearing excellent sound quality. Even the fit is very snug, they are extremely comfortably thanks to the very soft rubber material that is used. I am not aware of wearing these earphones at all, there is no discomfort even after extended use.

The Chord

Although I didn't see the chord listed as anti-twist chord anywhere in Sony's literature, I am glad to report this set has never twisted in to a mess of cable so they seem quite resistant to coiling.

The length is not huge, however with the PSP you'll be plugging them into the remote control chord bundled with the PSP anyway, so the two combined give plenty of length. The left and right earphones are quickly and easily identified even in the dark as the left one has a shorter length of chord at the point where the two channels separate from the main chord. I read that the reason for this is so the right cable can be run around the back of the head to avoid it from getting in the way, but that's down to personal preference.

Sound Quality

I have been very impressed with the sound quality of these earphones. Whether they are used for music, movies or games they perform superbly. The effect of the PSP's equaliser can clearly be heard, although I have settled on the Jazz setting as giving the best all round performance.

The high frequencies sound clear and crisp without sounding tinny, and the lower end of the scale is also well represented. The bass is not overbearing, but it's presence definitely adds depth to the sound, especially in movie playback. In movies voice reproduction is excellent, and I did not have any problems with loud sound effects overpowering the voice levels.

The PSP already has a bit of a reputation for great sound in their games. Two notable titles in this respect are of course Lumines and Gripshift. The pop tunes in Lumines sound simply fantastic, as do the electronica sounds from Gripshift. During Gripshift I even closed my eyes and put my head back just to enjoy the background music to some levels. Of course this happens all the time with the great tracks included with Lumines.

The mp3's I listened to were 384Kbps recordings straight from my CD collection and they sounded great. The thing about in ear buds is that you can hear things with a clarity you simply do not get from loudspeakers in a household environment. I was hearing instruments I simply had not heard before in some tracks, tracks I had played a hundred times over previously.

Specification

Here's the specification as listed on the Sony website.

- Super sound quality
- Closed earphone structure enables powerful bass reproduction
- Ultra small 9 mm driver unit and the soft silicon earbud provides a stable and comfortable fit
- 400 kj/m3 high-power Neodymium magnet is used to reproduce powerful bass and clear treble sound
- Short 0.5 m lead to connect conveniently to any remote commander

Conclusion

Not cheap - but great quality and superbly comfortable. The Sony MDR-EX71's are great performers and without a doubt have transformed the use of my PSP. The PSP has been known for it's fantastic screen since day one, now I can appreciate it for its sound reproduction too.

One final note for owners of the white PSP is that there is a white version of the Fontopia MDR-EX71 available.

Buy from Amazon.com