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Review: Noise Terminator Sniper Throat Mic

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By Supergeek
Photos by KornKob

The NT Sniper represents a mid-range tactical microphone solution specifically designed for airsoft and mil-sim sports, a fact which becomes immediately clear upon opening the package. Certainly, this is a significant step beyond the assortment of low-end communications gear readily available from the local Wal-Mart or sporting goods store. Having tried an assortment of these earpieces and boom microphones and never being completely satisfied, I'm confident that that NT Sniper is a far superior device in just about all criteria.

The Sniper comes packaged in a simple, but attractive cardboard box with specific model and type marked on a chart on the back. The model is designated by icons depicting its specific use - a motorcycle for their in-the-helmet GP line, a computer for the Professional/office model, etc. The sniper model is indicated by the outline of a handgun, which I found to be profoundly, if absurdly, amusing. Additionally, PTT/Vox options, pin type, and earpiece models are marked.

Inside the packaging is the sniper headset itself and a simple instruction sheet. The Sniper headset itself is well designed for its intended purpose. There is high density foam on the arms which keeps it secure on the neck when actively moving. It is light enough so that even vigorous action of the neck and head do not significantly displace it. Similarly, the earbud's weight is inconsequential. There is no strain on the ear at all and I can't imagine it falling off. Of course, there's also the consideration of the cool secret-service look, but that's a completely subjective matter which cannot be properly discussed in a review of this nature. The translucent earbud cord is coiled and offers enough distance from the back of the neckpiece to allow just about anyone regardless of height to wear it comfortably. The rear clip holding the earbud assembly in place is capable of being rotated, allowing either right- or left-sided wearing of the earbud.

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The arms of the headset are adjustable for larger or smaller necks, though it is apparently not a "one-size-fits-all" design. On smaller necks, even with the arms at their minimum length, the transponders are not in position to be pushed into contact with the throat surface. Specifically, this will mainly be a problem with women and younger children, but a specific measurement of limits is difficult to obtain – my friend was unable to accommodate the Sniper, but I was reluctant to ask her to wrap a tape measure around her neck. Having said that, for the average male airsoft player, fit should not be a big concern. My neck is certainly not very wide either, and the sniper fits comfortably there at near the minimum adjustment.

The transponders are made of plastic and the documentation specifically warns against applying pressure directly on them, but most of rest of the unit is of sturdier material. The arms are metal and much of the miscellaneous hardware on the back is as well. The cables all seem to be relatively sturdy, with the attachment points on the PTT switch especially thick and well-built. The PTT switch itself is large, quite beneficial tactically, as smaller switches designed for recreational users are oftentimes very difficult to locate and switch on, especially with gloves. The switch is textured blue rubber which clicks tacitly to indicate depression. There is a metal clip behind it to hold it in place as well as a volume control wheel on the side. According to the manual, while "the Sniper is highly water resistant, it is not waterproof. Do not immerse it in water." I suppose this is essentially saying that the unit will function fine with the expected sweat of a tactical engagement. Given the relative immobility of such a rig and the secure attachment of the PTT, the only weak point in the entire setup in terms of reliability and sturdiness in the field should be the transponders, a weakness which cannot be avoided if the sensitivity of the unit is to be retained.



The documentation has a diagram which shows the proper placement

of the transponders. Instead of placing them directly in the front of the throat, the correct way is to have them be placed on the sides, towards the edges of what appear to be muscles. Exact placement will be different for each person, so quite a bit of adjustment and testing will be required when first trying out the unit, but once that positioning has been established, it is fairly easy to find again in the future. Sound quality from the microphone is quite good, considering the nature of the reception. Voices picked up through the transponders have a flat quality to them. There is little contrast to the timbre of the sound, which has an effect much like that of a telephone. Regardless, overall quality of sound is still quite good, as demonstrated by the sample recording at the bottom. It is certainly on the level with any low or mid-range microphone system, if a slight bit flatter. The level of the sound does not differ linearly with the loudness of speech, but it is affected. Unlike more professional setups, it does not seem that a mere whisper will be able to be understood very well, though soft speaking will work quite well. I estimate that in the outdoors, one would be able to communicate quite clearly over the radio with the Sniper and not allow anyone within 25 feet to hear. Listen to the recorded sample to hear it yourself.



The biggest advertised feature of the throat microphone is no doubt the "zero background noise" nature of throat mics – they pick up only the vibrations of the throat. Since I would have difficulty bringing digital recording equipment into the field, I simulated the tests with some very loud music in the background, specifically the Dies Irae segment of W.A. Mozart's Requiem. The tests were conducted with the Sniper and a fairly good quality Platronics headset boom mic as the control. The Platronics headset is of far better construction and recording capability than similar, cheaper units for the radio, but it is still a standard open microphone. The volume of the Mozart was also set exceedingly high – given that nothing explodes, there simply will not be nearly the same level of continuous noise in the average airsoft game. The tests clearly shows that while the NT Sniper was not 100% free of background noise since the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra strings section was actually vibrating my throat, it still offered very near that level. The voice in the recording is as clear as if there was no music. On the other hand, the Platronics mic offered a much more natural and dynamic recording of my voice – but also of the background sound. Given the inevitable distortion and clutter from radio communications, background noise like that could very easily disrupt communications and make things difficult to understand. And considering the fact that the Sniper stays in place relatively well, the effects would be further exaggerated if the boom mic slipped out of place.





The earpiece offers relatively poor bass and treble, but given the design of the earpiece, it is not any worse than can be expected. After plugging in a common 2.5mm to 3.5mm jack adapter, I listened to several hours of music, ranging from Vivaldi to the Max Payne 2 soundtrack. While the mid-tones were relatively crisp, the sound was muddy at the upper and lower ends of the spectrum. Admittedly, it is perfectly fine for the purpose of tactical communication, but those who would occasionally desire to unplug their headset from the radio and connect it to the iPod for a little Wagner during an attack, would be disappointed.

But returning to seriousness, the Noise Terminator Sniper offers several many significant advantages over traditional boom or earpiece microphones and no tangible disadvantages save the price. Even the voice distortion is made essentially insignificant by the sound quality of radio communications. The Sniper is available in one- and two-pin setups, but with a set of 2.5mm adapters, it can be adapted to just about anything. I was able to use it with both my computer and Samsung cell phone. It allows rapid and strenuous motion without being moved out of place. The design doesn't allow very much to snag on equipment or branches, and is sturdy enough for field use - too many cheaper headsets break at the sight of an airsoft field. The NT Sniper further allows, to a good measure, discrete communications and comprehension in high-noise environments. All of these features make the Sniper extremely well adapted for airsoft games for a price that, while not cheap, is still a fair mid-point between mass-market consumer and professional gear.



Test Samples:

Sound Quality test	normal volume, no background noise	Sample
Simulated Background Noise	normal volume, very high background noise	Samples: NT Sniper / Boom Mic
Low Volume	Volume starting with 1 and counting to 10, decreasing volume until 9 is a whisper and 10 is a very soft	Sample

whisper

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