
f you're looking for headphones that sound good and feel great, while reducing outside noise by 24 dB, check out the radiosport RS20S "Dream Edition" from Arlan Communications.

CQ Reviews:

radiosport RS20S **"Dream Edition" Headset**

BY CQ STAFF

The *radiosport* RS20S is part of a comprehensive line of headsets and boom mic/headset combos manufactured by Arlan Communications for use in the amateur radio, commercial, and government communications markets. Because the fall/winter operating season includes so many CW contests, we're going to take a look at Arlan's RS20S "Dream Edition" headset from a CW operator's viewpoint.

Feature Highlights

The RS20S is a deluxe and very rugged headset designed to provide up to 24 dB of passive ambient noise reduction by virtue of its earpad design. No "active noise reduction" circuitry is utilized (more on this later). The RS20S includes a fully adjustable stainless-steel top band with padding in the center to cushion the operator's head. The length of the band may be adjusted for the best fit and then locked with set screws, and the earpads may be rotated ± 20 degrees or thereabouts to follow the exact contour of the operator's skull and ears.

The "Dream Edition" is equipped with cloth-covered gel ear cushions, allowing the earpads to form-fit the operator and keep the operator's ears cool during extended operating sessions. The cloth covers are easily removed for washing, a good idea after a 48-hour contest or Field Day!

The RS20S is wired for stereo and diversity reception, and is fitted with a 3.5-mm ($1/8$ -inch) stereo plug. A $1/4$ -inch adapter for use with larger base station rigs is supplied in the box, and the supplied cord is 6 feet (1.83 m) long.

First Impressions

The impression that one immediately feels upon opening the RS20S packing box is "quality." The black carbon-fiber finish conveys the notion that this is a serious headset, and the polished stainless-steel hardware used in the construction of the RS20S only reinforces the classy appearance.

The other impression that is felt is "ruggedness." In part this is because of the high-quality components used in

construction, as well as the extensive efforts that Arlan Communications apparently devoted to strain relief and protection of the cable that links the left and right earphones. In addition to the channel through the top cushion



Front view of Arlan Communications' *radiosport* RS20S "Dream Edition" headset. The steel band may be adjusted for best fit and locked into place. (Photos courtesy Arlan Communications)



Side view of the RS20S headphones. Features include cloth-covered gel earpads for exquisite comfort.

ion assembly, there are four sliding strain-relief guides that keep the cable neatly dressed by the stainless-steel frame. It's neat and clean, yet it allows free movement of the cable as the headset is put on and taken off; these steps help minimize strain on the connecting cable, always a potential failure point in any headset.

The overall ruggedness of the RS20S gives one confidence in the notion of packing the headset in a suitcase for transport to a DXpedition location. This headset is built to travel, and built to last!

Fit and Feel

The RS20S uses "passive" noise reduction, which basically means that the pressure against your head seals out the outside noise. Anyone who has used "aviation" headsets knows that the extreme pressure they exert on one's ears will cause an instant headache, making them unsuitable for long DX or contest operating sessions. The RS20S, however, does not suffer from this condition, and indeed it has been cleverly crafted to ensure long-duration comfort.

While the RS20S doesn't provide the 50+ dB of noise reduction found in aviation headsets, the specified 24 dB

of noise reduction provides significant improvement in one's ability to hear the incoming receiver audio, both indoors (in a multi-operator contest environment) and outdoors (for Field Day or emergency communications). Also, you don't get the "50-dB headache" either; if there is too much or too little pressure against your head, just bend the stainless-steel band a bit and you'll quickly find the fit to be to your liking.

The gel ear cushions are a revelation in that they truly provide a new dimension in comfort. The gel forms to fit the exact contour of your ear, accounting for things such as reading glasses, which many operators have to use while on the air. The cloth covers do not detract from the noise quieting, and the combination of the gel cushions and the cloth covers make these headsets the most comfortable units our review team has ever used.

On the Air

Our review team used the RS20S in several contests, using base-station rigs from six major manufacturers. In every case the drive level from the receiver's headphone jack was more than sufficient to drive the RS20S comfortably, and the audio recovery was clear and without distortion; this indicates that there are no impedance-matching issues with this headset when used with modern amateur rigs.

The frequency response of the RS20S appears to have been well-designed. When using a rig on CW at a very narrow bandwidth, no annoying hiss was heard. This may be a by-product both of the natural frequency response of the headphone speakers and their chamber, along with the 40-ohm impedance of the headset, but the recovered audio was always natural without painful peaks in the response on CW.

SSB and AM signals sounded great, with full envelope recovery, and connection to a laptop yielded excellent listening quality on music as well.

Bottom Line

The RS20S "Dream Edition" headset is an outstanding unit. It's attractive, ruggedly built, and it really helps you dig out weak signals by virtue of its noise-reduction characteristics and its well-engineered audio performance. Arlan Communications has shipped over 2.5-million headsets to its many customers in commercial communications markets since 1992, and this product is the beneficiary of the experience the company has garnered over the years. The RS20S is a headset that you'll buy with high expectations, and it doesn't disappoint!

The RS20S "Dream Edition" listen-only headset currently sells for \$119.00. An optional "cloth pillow" accessory is available, for even more top-side cushioning, for \$39.00. Also, the "standard" version of the RS20S, without the gel earpads and cloth earpad covers, sells for \$85.00.

For more details on the RS20S and Arlan Communications' complete line of headsets, with and without boom mics, visit <www.arlancommunications.com> or call 805-504-3944.