

T+A Solitaire T

The German high-end marque's take on a wireless headphone is slightly different from everybody else's – and **Ed Selley** thinks it's rather clever

WHEN IS A wireless headphone not a wireless headphone?

Take a quick look at T+A's Solitaire T and you would be forgiven for thinking it is a fairly standard example of the cut-the-cable breed, with aptX HD and AAC Bluetooth supported by switchable noise cancelling and an impressive 70-hour rated battery life. The reality is a little different though.

On this premium set, T+A adds an 'HQ mode' where the decoding configuration changes; the noise-cancelling chip powers off and the Bluetooth signal goes through an ESS DAC for decoding and volume adjustment. This signal then heads off to different amplification stages again before passing to the drivers. Claimed battery life in this mode drops to 35 hours.

Want another option? You can switch everything off and enjoy the Solitaire T as a passive headphone via a connector that – unusually for 2022 – is analogue at both ends (and supports balanced and unbalanced signals). Use this with the power switch off and the headphone becomes genuinely passive, with the entire main board bypassed. So the idea is that you can run the Solitaire T as a 'classic' home headphone before powering it up, pairing it to your smartphone and walking out the door.

Bold and beautiful

All this funky functionality comes in at a significant cost – the £1,200 Solitaire T is the

most expensive such device I've yet tested – but you can see where the money has gone. The aluminium frame that holds the closed-back earcups (each featuring a 42mm cellulose driver) is beautifully finished and everything about the way you wear and use the Solitaire T suggests that plenty



of thought and effort has gone into the design. You get an excellent carry case too.

Operation is done via hard controls, because currently there is no control app (although one is promised). T+A's buttonry is well placed and intuitive.

Space within

Use the Solitaire T as a wireless, noise-cancelling headphone and the performance is extremely good. Even in a fairly loud environment, the complex arrangements of *Fragments* by Bear's Den was easy to latch onto, and the Solitaire T found space within the mix where many closed-back designs struggle. However, the more affordable, but still high-end, Mark Levinson No.5909 (HCC #331) and Bowers & Wilkins Px8 (HCC #336) both offer slightly more sophisticated noise cancelling, and the sheer isolation that the No.5909 model in particular offers is extremely impressive.

SPECIFICATIONS

DRIVE UNITS: 2 x 42mm 'low-tolerance' cellulose dynamic drivers **CONNECTIONS:** USB-C (battery charging/audio signal); 2.5mm balanced **BLUETOOTH:** Yes. v5.2 with AAC and aptX HD **NOISE CANCELLING:** Yes **WEIGHT:** 322g

FEATURES: Qualcomm QCC 5127 Bluetooth chipset; ESS ES9218 Sabre DAC; HQ Mode; passive functionality; battery life rated at 70 hours (35 hours in HQ mode); hard carry case; USB-C and analogue cables with 3.5mm and 6.35mm termination; 4x ANC microphones

The cans are offered in white/silver or black/silver

If you are in a quieter space – not a silent one, just quieter – T+A's HQ mode is a step forward over any wireless system I have lived with up to this point. As the design has excellent mechanical isolation, the noise floor is low to the point of inaudible and this gives the Solitaire T a dynamic punch that makes music/film material sound vivid and extremely engaging. I watched the second episode of the new season of *Slow Horses* via the headphone and, while the AAC codec supplied by my iPad Pro has some limitations compared to aptX, the result was still cinematic and possessed of a three-dimensionality that's rare in closed-back cans.

Neither is the Solitaire T done there. I connected an iFi GO Bar DAC/headphone amp to the iPad Pro and rewatched sequences from the same episode with the Solitaire T in passive mode. The jump in fine detail and overall tangibility was a genuine surprise; this is not the most sensitive headphone around but with decent power on tap the performance is competitive with standalone passive models in the high hundreds of pounds. It also does a brilliant job of capturing the character of the source equipment, such is its transparent delivery.

Formidable

When you remember that you can power on the Solitaire T and listen to music on the move, wire-free, the scope of what T+A has built here becomes clear. Yes, in specific areas, the very best wireless and wired designs score points over it, and there's no getting around the fact it isn't 'cheap' – but the Solitaire T is a unique and formidable all-rounder. Highly recommended ■

HCC VERDICT



T+A Solitaire T

→ £1,200 → www.ta-hifi.de

WE SAY: The Solitaire T bridges the gap between wired home headphone and wireless travel partner in a way that almost nothing else can.