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# Final Audio Design Heaven IV In-Ear Earphone Review

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*Does the world need yet more high-end earphones? In this case, we'll make an exception.*

by [Ed Selley](#) Jul 17, 2013

HOME CINEMA *review*



SRP: £169.00

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At the moment, I could devote all of my monthly review slots to the influx of earphones hitting the market and barely scratch the surface. At every price point from pence through to several hundred pounds new models are hitting the shelves at a phenomenal rate. Given that the choice of c£150 earphones has gone from perhaps two brands to nearly twenty, it is a fair question to ask whether all of these models can justify their existence - I know the market is growing but there have to be limits to the number of people that wake up and decide they need £150+ earphones.

The earphones you see here are superficially little different from any of the others breaking cover at the moment. They are exactly built, offer high performance and come with some awesome packaging - more of which later. They are however a little different from the competition. Final Audio Design isn't a start-up. This Japanese company is nearly forty years old and have produced some exceptionally high-end audio products in that time. The company has changed their focus over the last few years to concentrate on portable audio but haven't lost their high-end attitude. The Heaven IV you see here is firmly towards the lower end of a range of earphones that go all the way up to - deep breath - \$2,600. This is a company that means business.

The omens are good then for something special but it doesn't change the scale of the task ahead of it. £150 buys you the Musical Fidelity EB-50 or Audio Technica CKS-90 (to name but two AVForums has reviewed from the arsenal of models available.) Both of these models are also well built and well specified and come with natty carrying pouches. Can this little piece of Japanese exotica stand out against such talented competition or is this another model that won't deliver the goods in a packed field?

## Design

There are only so many things you can do to something the size of a pair of earphones in terms of styling and appearance to make them different from one another - after all, first and foremost they need to fit in your ear. The bulk of variation occurs on the inside of earphones and the c£150 point is interesting because it sees the very best of the dynamic driver models go head to head with the first armature based drivers. The Final is an armature design - the sound is created by the armature vibrating in a magnetic field instead of a driver moving back and forth.



This is a big investment - armatures of any quality cost more than their dynamic counterparts and the enclosure has to be engineered to a high standard to make it work properly. It is perfectly possible to do at the price - Musical Fidelity do a fine job with the EB-50 - but this is still the 'hard way' of going about making a pair of earphones. Part of this is down to the absolute necessity of getting a near perfect fit between the 'dome' of the earphone and the ear canal. If you don't the bass output of the armature all but vanishes and you lose the sound quality that you are striving for.

The Heaven IV is a single armature design (making the fitment requirements even more important) but has been augmented with what the company calls 'Balanced Air Movement' technology which is designed to manage the movement of air initially generated by the armature and use it in the most efficient way possible. To this end, each enclosure is a relatively long 'tube made from aluminium that suggests that Final are trying to secure more oomph from their armature. More mysteriously Zen is the rear of the enclosure with a 'BAM vent port without an actual vent.' I've no idea how a ventless vent works but I'm sure it will help to reproduce

the sound of one hand clapping extremely well.

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An altogether more welcome feature of the Final is the cable. Firstly, at slightly over a metre long, it is almost a perfect length for having a device to hand without at the same time carrying around what feels like a small lasso. Secondly it is flat. Final says that this is to reduce interference on the cable from external sources but while this is hard to prove without being able to swap the cable, it definitely reduces the amount that the cable seems likely to tangle. This means that a swiftly coiled Heaven IV stuffed into one pocket compared to a pair of Audio Technica CKS90's treated the same way and stuffed into the other (because all the cool kids carry two pairs of earphones with them) will come out almost the same way they went in while the CKS90 will require some determined unpicking. Only the Atomic Floyd Superdarts, complete with Teflon coated cable can offer a superior performance in this regard. They have to give ground to the Final in one area though and that is the carrying case.

The transport options for earphones are very varied. They range from the 'absolutely sod all' option endorsed by the Grado GR8, via the leather boxes and pouches of the Audio Technica and Musical Fidelity and into the more leftfield options like the ThinkSound unbleached linen and the Atomic Floyd rubber disc. Final have decided on something radically different in this instance and decided to go for what honestly looks like a vintage cigarette case. This is a beautifully finished and even comes with a spring loaded clip and foam coated insides to ensure that the earphones themselves don't move around too much. Herein lies the downside of this rather fabulous device - it is realistically a bit big to keep in a pocket and is very much a 'manbag' style accessory. Kudos to Final for trying something a bit different though and if I ever start smoking I'm sorted for somewhere to put my snouts.



The case does finish off a very well built and very attractive set of earphones though. Everything on the Final feels carefully assembled and finished to a very high standard indeed. Earphones are a tough item to give a sense of 'value added' to but the Final feels and looks worth the asking price. I'm not a huge fan of white products - they tend to look dirty very quickly - but there is no getting around that the careful design and excellent materials that have gone into the Heaven IV. The choice of earbuds is good and the mount is a default size that should allow for aftermarket options to be used as well. The only serious omission is that there is no inline remote and mic arrangement but many Japanese brands with one eye on their home market which is more resistant to the charms of Apple than most, this probably is less of a design concern.



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Setup

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The Final went through the same process as the other earphones and headphones that pass through, being tested with an iPhone 4 and iPad 3 as well as my Lenovo ThinkPad with and without external headphone amps from Furutech and iBasso. Material used included lossless and high resolution FLAC via Songbird and compressed material from Spotify, YouTube and (in a rare moment of insanity) iTunes. They have been used in domestic settings as well as the train and tube and of course Sainsburys.

## Sound Quality

No amount of fancy carry cases and ventless vents are going to save a product that doesn't deliver sonically. The sheer number of earphones now on sale at this price point will see to that. I hadn't spent too long listening to the Heaven IV before it became clear that this is a product that delivers enough performance to go near the top of the class at the price point.



From the very outset, the benefits of using an armature are readily apparent. The Final has a speed and cohesiveness that really becomes apparent when you listen to them back to back with a dynamic driver. The sound is completely free of the overhang or congestion that can interfere with the performance of a conventional driver and allows for a very open and airy performance. This means that detail that can be lost with some of the competition is present and correct and delivered seamlessly with the rest of the performance.

The area where the Final truly excels however is the tonality. The handling of voices and instruments is not far off the astoundingly accomplished Grado GR8 which is considerably more expensive. The layered and complex *Song of the Stars* by Dead Can Dance is presented with a wonderfully vast soundstage that gives the impression of extending a considerable distance out from your head - no mean feat for something jammed into your ears. The solo guitar has a clarity - an almost etched tone to it - that grabs the attention and gives the performance an immediacy that very few earphones I've heard at this price can get anywhere near.





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The other big surprise with the Final is that they seem much less reliant on a perfect seal for their bass performance. Compared to the Musical Fidelity which suffered from a huge drop in low-end extension if there was any problem with the seal, the Final produces good bass performance provided that housings are in your ear canal with anything approaching an effective seal. This is a neat trick and something that armature earphones can struggle with - it is possible that the ventless vent is responsible - who can say?

The flipside to this is that the Final never has truly seismic bass in the manner of the EB-50 with a perfect seal or the dynamic drivered Audio Technica. The bass it has is beautifully integrated with the rest of the frequency range and has the same extraordinary texture and detail but this is not an earphone for dubstep fans. What is slightly confusing about this is that the lower midrange can often have more body to it than bass notes proper which is a bit odd but not distractingly so. It is almost as if the Final has been voiced to provide maximum emphasis on the midrange and this has partly curtailed the bass response. The emphasis isn't a dealbreaker but something to take into account.

The other mild criticism that the Final shares with some other single armature earphones is that very complex music can become slightly congested. Some fine detail can suffer in this instance but the main issue, that wonderful sense of space that simpler pieces have, shrinks a little and the result is not as competent as (rather more expensive) multiple armature designs can manage. This is where the dynamic drivered Audio Technica pulls back some advantage as although it doesn't have the same detail levels as the Final with simpler music, it doesn't really tail off with more complex stuff.



In use these issues aren't too severe. The other benefit is that the Heaven IV is extremely comfortable to use and you can go very long periods without any issue. The light weight and choice of materials makes for good long term comfort and the ease of getting a decent seal coupled with reasonable (if not exceptional) sensitivity means that they don't have to be driven too hard. Noise leakage to the outside world is also commendably low. If you are a runner or perform some other high impact activity, the Final would be likely to stay in place but won't match the Audio Technica for support and likelihood of staying in place.

## Conclusion

# 8

### The Good

- Wonderfully lively and involving sound

### Final Audio Design Heaven IV In-Ear Earphone Review

The earphone market is approaching saturation at the moment and the choice available is absolutely huge. Any new arrival is going to have to be very, very good to stand out and the Heaven IV manages to deliver a performance that ensures it does. In some regards, this is not an all rounder - the bass performance is not as polished as some of the competition and there is no way of making or receiving a call with them. Where they excel is in producing one of the most compelling and convincing performances I've had the pleasure of experiencing below £200. When you consider the excellent comfort, superb build and curiously ace carrying case, you have a pair of earphones that deserve to be auditioned. I'm starting to wonder what Final can do with the flagship models now?



- Superb build and lovely carry case
- Very comfortable



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### The Bad

- Some limits to bass extension
- Can struggle with very complex music
- Not cheap

**I own this** 0

**I want this** 0

**I had this** 0

## The Rundown

<i>Build Quality</i>	8
<i>Ease of Use</i>	9
<i>Sound Quality</i>	9
<i>Design</i>	8
<i>Sensitivity</i>	7
<i>Verdict</i>	8

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Reviewed by Ed Selley, 17th July 2013. Where they excel is in producing one of the most compelling and convincing performances Ive had the pleasure of experiencing below £200. When you consider the excellent comfort, superb build and curiously ace carrying case, you have a pair of earphones that deserve to be auditioned.

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