

# Sennheiser HD 490 Pro from £349

Jon Musgrave enjoys the surprisingly rare treat of headphones designed specifically for mixing and mastering

**KEY FEATURES** **DESIGN:** Open back, over ear **TRANSDUCER:** dynamic **TRANSDUCER**  
**DIAMETER:** 38mm **FREQUENCY RESPONSE:** 5Hz to 36kHz (-10dB at 100 Hz) **SENSITIVITY:** 105dB  
SPL (1kHz/1 Vrms); 96dB SPL (1 kHz/1 mW) **MAXIMUM SPL:** 128 dB SPL (1 kHz, 5% THD) **THD:**  
<0.2% (1kHz, 100dB SPL) **IMPEDANCE:** 130 ohms (1kHz) **WEIGHT:** 260g without cable

**S**ennheiser has a pretty solid rep when it comes to headphones. Their classic HD25 closed back design remains a popular choice with DJs. Meanwhile the 400 reference series are often recommended for mixing and mastering, and it's this series that has a new top of the range model.

The HD 490 Pro comes in two versions; Pro and Pro Plus. Both have the same underlying design, and include two sets of easily removable and washable earpads (velour and fabric), a removable velour headband and a 1.5m detachable lead. The Pro Plus also includes an additional 3m lead, a fabric headband and luxury case.

The headphones have an open back and over-ear design. This means they feel enclosed but without feeling isolating, and won't leave you with squashed ears even after long listening spells. The HD 490 Pro is designed specifically for mixing and mastering and to that end aims to deliver a flatter, monitor-style sound. Design features include ultra-light voice coils for fast response, and a special low-frequency cylinder to help with definition. Physical features include discreet L/R ear cup labelling, detachable locking cables that can be connected to either ear cup, and a robust padded metal headband. The headphones look and feel excellent, and this is enhanced by the open grille design, which reveals the back of the drivers.

On first listen there are no hyped lows (all-too common on consumer headphones), and the mid-range isn't too pokey, which is very encouraging. Meanwhile the definition and localisation of sounds is also impressive. Overall I would say the sound is smooth and balanced and refreshingly unlike many headphones one hears.

However, a key aspect of the HD 490 Pro is the earpads, which are each designed to deliver a slightly different sound. I'm not sure if this is a first for headphones, but it's an interesting concept all the same. The producing pads (velour) have a slightly sweetened delivery, with more bass and slightly crisper mids and highs.




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Meanwhile with the mixing pads (fabric) the bass is flatter and the overall sound more mid-range focused. That said, the difference is not massive, and my preference for the mixing earpads is simply personal taste. Either way, although the pads are reasonably easy to swap, I would – if it came down to it – rather get used to a particular configuration and stick with it. Even so, it's a nice idea and has been very well executed.

However, if you need to modify the headphone delivery more, the bundle includes a free licence (normally £90) for Dear Reality's dearVR MIX-SE. This plugin (AU, VST, AAX) adds virtual mix room functionality, with tailored curves for a number of different Sennheiser headphones, including the HD 490 Pro. I found it a useful tool, and with three adjustable mixing spaces as well as a number of environments (car, club, stadium and so on), it

provides a handy way to expand and finesse your referencing.

The HD 490 Pro is a reasonably expensive headphone, and this will deter a few people. Still, to my ears they very ably demonstrate how a function-specific design can really deliver. If you regularly mix or master on headphones you should definitely check them out. **FM**

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**FM VERDICT**

**9.8**

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**Sennheiser has done an excellent job creating headphones that meet the demands of mixing and mastering. Pricey but fab**

#### THE PROS & CONS



Neutral monitor-style sound

Two earpad designs to tweak delivery

Premium components and quality construction

Great accessories with Plus model

Bundled headphone environment plugin



Pricey