

BIG EAR MOTORCYCLE STEREO PLUGS

Ken "Hawkeye" Glassman
PRODUCT REVIEW



Back in 2003, Glenn Hood, founder of Big Ear, rode his motorcycle cross country, and was looking for ear plugs to alleviate the pain in his ears from the incessant wind noise. He discovered a silicon substance that could be molded into the perfect shape of one's ear, and a company was born. Shortly after, he fitted high quality music drivers and speakers into those ear plugs, and the business expanded. They set up at rally's and motorcycle events all over the country, and their reputation for high quality custom ear buds and excellent service grew across the country.



So when I was looking for a set of ear buds that would be used to listen to music inside my helmet on the road, as well as hook up to my GPS unit to hear the spoken directions, I wanted the best. I expected to have them made at the Chicago IMS Show this past February, but to my chagrin, Big Ear couldn't make it to Chicago. There were several copycats there with similar names, and one who even copied Big Ear's signage and booth appearance. I didn't bite. So I called Big Ear out in Colorado, to try to figure out where I could go to get them to make my ear phones. I spoke directly to Glenn Hood, and to my delight, he said, "You don't even have to leave your own home to get them made." He went on to tell me that he had developed a home kit that included everything you need to make your own ear molds, and just send them back to the company in a pre-paid, pre-addressed box, and they'll do the rest.

I was leery, but he assured that anyone can follow the DVD video and make the

molds, and if anything wasn't right, they wouldn't charge my credit card. A few days later the kit arrived. You can't do it on without assistance, so I got my daughter, who is a high school teacher to help me. We watched the short DVD twice, and got started.

First, she inserted a small plug with a string attached to it, into my ear canal with a tool they supply. Next, she mixed the silicon material together, which is like two bits of Silly Putty, and inserted it into the included syringe. Put a small piece of included Styrofoam between my front teeth to place the jaw in the perfect position to keep the ear canal open properly. Putting the tip of the syringe into the ear canal, she began to dispense the silicon, filling up the ear canal, and surrounding the inside of my ear. Then you wait four minutes for the silicon to harden, and remove it from the ear, and you get a perfect mold of the ear. The whole process for both ears takes 15 minutes at the most. I sent the molds back in the supplied box, and that was it.

12 days later, I received my finished ear phones back, ready to use. They obviously fit perfectly, since they were made from my own ear molds. I used them first with my iPod at the health club while on the treadmill. They were comfortable, and the sound quality was like sitting inside a symphony hall. Even at low volume, the sound was clear, crisp, with excellent bass, mid tones, and highs.

The next test was using them in my helmet. Because of the way the buds are designed, there is nothing that sticks out past your ear, so they fit perfectly inside the helmet, with no pressure on the ears that could cause discomfort. The buds block out any wind noise or whistle that I normally would hear in my open face helmet. And the sound quality was outstanding. It's important to keep the volume down inside the helmet so you can still hear the ambient sounds of traffic, but the music still sounded great. And when hooked up to my GPS, the spoken directions were easy to hear and follow.

I was impressed with the whole process, from start to finish. It was easy to make the molds, and the finished product exceeded my expectations. I got the BE-1C Stereo Ear Plugs, which cost \$350. Big

Ear also makes more expensive models designed for professional musicians. And if you just want plain molded ear plugs, they start at \$85. Big Ear also makes ear plug products for firearm enthusiasts, and also industrial use.



And now, Big Ear can also transform almost any Bluetooth telephone device into a custom fit ear piece, for those who want to wear that device all day with comfort. And once they have your ear molds, they save them, so you can have them make any of their products for you in the future. That Bluetooth device will be my next purchase, because I hate how those things feel stuck in my ear.

To get more information, visit their web site at www.bigearinc.com, or call 866-661-2041 or 719-531-6868. Just don't get fooled by the copy-cat companies out there. Deal with the one that has the reputation and track record for excellence.



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SADDLEMEN "TRACK" MODEL REPLACEMENT SEAT PRODUCT REVIEW



For years, I've enjoyed my Kawasaki Ninja 650R . . . except for the seat. My Ninja's seat is uncomfortable, and after about 60 minutes or so, the pressure it puts on my pelvic bones and tail bone gets to be painful and numbing and I need to get off for a while.

Unlike Cruiser bikes, there are fewer after market replacement seat options for sporty bikes. But I found a solution for my Ninja, and I'm embarrassed because it comes from a company with an excellent reputation for seats and saddlebags . . . Saddlemen.



As it turns out, Saddlemen does not make a replacement seat for the Ninja 650R model, yet. There are many motorcycle models out there, and it's hard to replicate every seat pan for every model. They anticipate having an off-the-shelf seat by the end of summer. However, they will customize seats for just about any motorcycle if you send them your seat. They can take it apart, work their magic on it, and then return it to you. So over the winter, I shipped my seat off to California, and two weeks later, it was back on my bike.

Saddlemen makes three different models of seats for sport and sporty bikes to choose from. The biggest differences among the seats are the material they use for the seat covering, and trim. I chose the "Track" model. That seat has a slightly bucketed rear section that contours to the rider's rump for all day comfort. The design of the seat incorporates their "Gel Channel" technology that features a split piece of SaddleGel material and a cut-out channel in the base foam that relieves pressure on the tailbone.

So the way it works is this. First they strip it down to the bare metal seat pan. Then they take injection molded foam, contoured to fit properly on each individual seat pan. Embedded into the foam on each side of the cut-out centerline is their patented SaddleGel, located to correspond to the center of each butt cheek. Then they place a thin layer of foam on top of that before they cover the seat with the top layer of fabric that you see.

Now my complaint about my old stock seat was that it was too hard, and put pressure on my pelvic bones, so I asked for a softer seat with the gel. But according to Saddlemen's Jerry Beatie, who oversees all seat production, I was totally off base. He told me the reason why my stock seat was uncomfortable was that it was in fact, too soft. And that softness meant that I was compressing the foam to the point that it had no more support to give, which was causing the pressure points. And most people think of the gel insert as being designed for softness. In reality, it is designed to be firm, and to evenly displace the pressure and distribute your weight over more area of the seat for more comfort. So while it sounds counter-intuitive, a firmer seat (by using the right materials) will be a more comfortable seat in the long run. And since Saddlemen's seats have that cut-out channel down the center, my tailbone wasn't pressing down on the seat material, and causing pain. And, with more use, the foam in the seat will break in and conform to my shape and where I position myself on the seat, and become even more comfortable. After a

few months of riding, that has proved to be true.

Now that my seat is broken in, I can now ride through a full tank of gas, which can be anywhere from two to four hours, without needing to get off and walk around for fifteen minutes. And style-wise, the seat looks great. You can even choose a color for the center strip to match your bike, or go with black. As you can see from the pictures, I chose brushed aluminum, to go with the silver color of my bike. My seat is a one-piece job, but they make two-piece seats as well for those bikes that have that style.



If Saddlemen already stocks a replacement seat for your bike, their seats will cost \$259. If they have to make up a seat for you, like they did for my bike, the cost goes up to about \$349, because there is more labor to dismantle the seat you send them, and rebuild it. They made a seat for a red Ducati SuperMotard that is a work of art, as you can see from the photo. So, it is a small price to pay for having a seat that will offer you all day comfort, and style. And they make replacement seats to fit hundreds of motorcycles from Japanese brands to European brands, and American brands, and for cruiser, sport touring, sporty and race replica bikes.

You can check out all of Saddlemen's seats and other products, and look for specific fitments for your bike by going to www.saddlemen.com, or calling them for custom information at 800-397-7709.