



the t.bone IEM D2.4

Budget-friendly and feature-packed - perhaps more than just the perfect introduction to in-ear monitoring

BY PETE EMERY

INITIALLY, OUR ADOPTION of in-ear monitoring systems was a reluctant one. The adrenaline-inducing feel of air getting shoved around by blaring monitors and real amps vibrating the stage is nothing less than addictive. However, these loud stages are getting less and less common in professional gigging environments, and the silent stage is now a necessary reality for many, with in-ear monitors being the centre of that eco-system. It's no surprise then that we have seen a significant increase in choice and affordability in this market over the last few years. One of which is the t.bone IEM D2.4, which, with an impressive amount of features for the price and with the bonus of a rechargeable battery and charging station, seems on paper to fall into “bang for your buck” territory. Let's see how it stacks up.

Performance

Bearing in mind that this is a relatively affordable bit of gear, we should expect to see some areas in which money has been saved, and the use of a plastic chassis on the receiver is one such place. However, it still feels sturdy enough to endure a fair bit of stage-related abuse, so this is far from a deal-breaker, and we have seen flimsier constructions on more expensive systems. Given that they protrude from the chassis and are attached to an often enthusiastic (as they should be) musician, antennas on receivers are a common point of failure. On the D2.4, they are moulded, which is something that would usually be a negative, but the stocky dual antenna setup here feels solid enough that we're not worried at all about it being able to withstand the throws of life on a stage. Impressively, the t.bone IEM D2.4 comes with a rechargeable battery and charging station. Having gone through literally hundreds of batteries with other IEM systems, this is a huge value add and sets the t.bone apart from many of its competitors. Assuming it sounds good, of course. Spoiler alert: it does.

On to the transmitter, which is a bit more tank-like in construction and helpfully comes with a rackmount too. We have the standard LED screen, and a couple of extra features that are uncommon on units in this price range - a loop to forward audio on to other pieces of gear and RJ45 connectors for digital options. Not things that most will typically use, but bonuses nonetheless. As we start getting audio from the t.bone, we happily leave the user manual untouched, as the simple controls are self-explanatory enough. Input your audio in the back of the transmitter, then set your channel and ID before syncing with the receiver via the IR function, and we're away. We'll have it noted, though, that we did then read the manual like the well-behaved reviewers we are. In getting a clean signal, it is important to note that the t.bone D2.4 works in the busy 2.4GHz range. This is the spectrum that is used by wireless internet routers, Bluetooth devices, and many other things, so it's something that needs consideration when deciding which IEM system is right for you.



“A very capable piece of kit that will see most players a long way into their gigging career”

We fell foul of this at a theatre gig a few years back. All was well during sound check, until the room filled with 2,000 people and their devices, and we started getting dropouts. Luckily, we had a wired backup in place for exactly this eventuality. Without a scan function to find the clearest channel and being limited to just the eight, if you are a band playing bigger venues or running multiple wireless systems, the 2.4GHz spectrum may be one to avoid. But if you are playing smaller functions or pubs, and don't mind a bit of manual scrolling to find the best channel, then the chance of an issue is low enough that most won't need to worry. Utilising the t.bone IEM D2.4 and some backing tracks to do some solo rehearsing for a few gigs we have coming up, we find the LED input meters particularly useful in making sure we have a strong audio signal going in. The noise floor is a little higher than our usual Shure PSM 300, but not at all close to the realms of problematic, and the t.bone is less than half the price, so this sort of difference is to be expected. With a clear sound, we're able to run through the set completely problem-free. It just works. We are using our Mackie MP460 in-ear monitors (headphones), which are nice, but will only remain so if provided with good audio from the D2.4. All the elements of the mix are coming through clearly with good stereo separation and most frequencies well represented, with only a slight increase in tinny high end and a little lack of thump, which is true for a lot of in-ear systems, many of them being much more expensive than the t.bone. All in all, a good audio experience.

Scrolling through the options, there are a few EQ settings to try - a low boost, a high boost, and a low cut. The low boost and high boost are subtle, which might be handy to lightly tweak a mix you are not in control of. The low cut is probably a little too severe, almost completely removing the bass and kick, but perhaps useful if you are not working with moulded in ears and are getting lots of room sound from an acoustic kit, and a live bass. Further EQ options are found via the Eardrive menu, which is designed to get the best out of different sets of headphones. In use, they are subtle EQ changes, which seem to mostly affect the mid-range. We can't foresee a situation where adjustment here makes a huge difference, but it's another nice option that may just help cheaper headphones sound a little bit better, although it's far from a replacement for a set of decent in-ear monitors (headphones). Lastly, the stereo options available on the D2.4 are fairly standard but easy to use. The main benefit is that it allows for the running of two separate mixes, one on the L channel, one on the R. Set two receivers to mixed (mono) mode, and one can be balanced left and the other right, producing two separate mono mixes to two separate receivers working from



musicradar VERDICT



Not the cheapest, but still budget-friendly, the t.bone IEM D2.4 is more than just the perfect introduction to IEM systems, but a piece of kit that will see most players a long way into their gigging career.

PROS

- + Inexpensive considering features and quality.
- + Easy to use.
- + Rechargeable battery and charging station.

CONS

- 2.4GHz is a cluttered spectrum.
- No channel scanning.

SPECS

KEY FEATURES: Type - IEM system, transmitter and receiver Inputs - 2 x combo, 1x RJ45 Outputs - L and R stereo loop out, 1xRJ45, 1 x half-wave antenna Output frequency - 2.4GHz Channels - 8 Battery Life - 8hrs, rechargeable Frequency response - 5Hz-23KHz Signal to noise ratio - >115dB **DIMENSIONS:** 209 x 42 x 115mm **WEIGHT:** Transmitter 850g, receiver 98g **INCLUDES:** Rechargeable battery and station, 2 x 12vDC adapter

one frequency on a single transmitter. That's just one way to use this feature, but the main point is that the setup process here is easy to carry out, with settings on both the transmitter and receiver concisely labelled.

Verdict

Whilst we had a reluctant start to our in-ear monitor journey, what it gives us is control over our own audio mix, ears that ring less after a gig, and a voice that is less likely to get strained. Yes, we still miss feeling that on-stage volume, but the benefits of IEM systems make the compromises entirely worth it. To get those benefits, however, you need a system that is easy to use, provides clear audio, and is devoid of dropouts and interference. Happily, the t.bone IEM D2.4 does exactly that. Whilst a more expensive unit may provide a nicer experience in terms of a lower noise floor, frequency scanning, and more channels within a less cluttered spectrum, the t.bone is a very capable piece of kit that will cover the bases for anyone playing pub gigs or small functions, assuming you don't have too many band members on that same 2.4GHz range. It's not the cheapest, but it's far from the most expensive, keeping it well within the budget-friendly bracket. What you get from it is more than just the perfect introduction to in-ear monitoring, as it is something that will happily see you through those smaller gigs until you are ready to upgrade, if indeed you ever feel the need to.

