

EARPLUGS TESTED BY THE LONDON AMBULANCE SERVICE

RiDE gets the opinion of professionals who use earplugs on a daily basis as part of their job



The Motorcycle Response Unit of the London Ambulance Service are a crucial part of the world's biggest ambulance service, darting around the capital charged with being first to the scene of serious road accidents and major incidents. But for a change let's think about *their* wellbeing.

A crucial part of their riding kit is earplugs. They need to be comfortable and to protect the riders' hearing, but they also need to let through enough sound so that they're aware of what's going on around them. So who better to carry out an earplugs test for RiDE? We asked unit members Richard Kingham,

Tracey Tomlin, Jimmy Marr and Matt White to try a dozen or so from a selection we gave them, most provided by Lucy Dell Earplugs (www.lucydellearplugs.co.uk). They were also keen to try some mouldable silicone putty earplugs (provided by www.allearplugs.com).

It's not a scientific test, because so much depends on fit: a pair that fits you perfectly will be better for you than a theoretically more protective pair that don't fit so well.

There were some clear favourites for the London testers, but the message is: try a lot of different plugs yourself. They cost a matter of pennies and they could save your hearing.

EXPERT HINTS ON CHOOSING AND USING

Lucy and Chris Dell, Britain's leading authorities on earplugs for motorcyclists, say that fit is almost everything. If a plug doesn't expand to form a complete seal, then too much noise can get in.

Most plugs need to be carefully rolled, before inserting into the ear canal with two fingers of one hand while you pull the top of the ear with the other hand. It's the only way to be sure you're getting the plugs in right, at least at first. If they work their way out while you're riding, or

fall out when you remove your helmet, they're the wrong size, or weren't inserted properly.

The Dells also say that the left and right plugs should be stored separately, so infection isn't passed between ears (or, ideally, plugs should only be worn once).

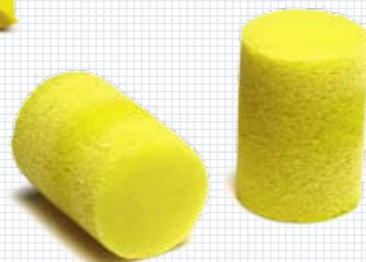
Plugs that have stems, which can make insertion easier, are usually more effective with the stems trimmed - anything that sticks out will transmit more noise into the ear.



EAR Classic

PVC foam
£3.50 for 10 pairs

Richard: "Good noise reduction - in fact, you don't hear anything. But they're itchy."



Peltor Next Solar

Polyurethane foam
£3.50 for 10 pairs

Richard reckons they let through too much noise, although they're very comfortable.



Peltor Next No-Touch

Foam plug with stems
£2.75 for four pairs

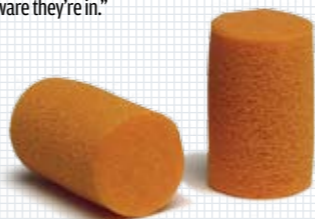
Tracey: "They're a good fit and easy to install, but they picked up every bump or dip in the road. I can't wait to throw these in the bin."



North Sound-Fit

PVC foam
£3 for 10 pairs

They're like the Classic but smaller. Tracey says the comfort is good and the noise reduction moderate, while Richard thinks the noise reduction is just right, allowing you to hear voices, but the comfort is bad: "You're always aware they're in."



EAR EARsoft FX

Polyurethane foam
£3.50 for 10 pairs

Tracey: "Very comfortable, and they keep the wind noise out but I'm still able to hear the important noises." Richard: "The comfort is excellent and the noise reduction good, but they lose shape quickly."



Howard Leight Quiet QD-1

Rubber
£1.40 a pair

Most testers found them too big and uncomfortable. Tracey: "They let wind in at high speed."



Howard Leight Max

Polyurethane foam
£3.50 for 10 pairs

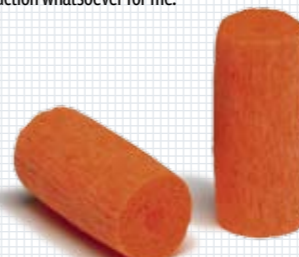
Richard: "Very comfortable, excellent fit, and the noise reduction is good, with no pain from the siren on my Pan European."



Howard Leight Matrix

Push-in foam
£3.50 for 10 pairs

Tracey reckons they let through too much road noise. "Comfort is good," says Richard, "but there's no noise reduction whatsoever for me."



Howard Leight Airsoft

Rubber (washable)
£2 a pair

Tracey: "OK for short journeys." Richard: "Crap."



Howard Leight Laser Lite

Polyurethane foam
£3.50 for 10 pairs

Tracey: "Comfortable and easy to get in, with good noise reduction." Richard says they get dirty too easily.



EAR Push-Ins

Foam plug with stems
£2.50 for four pairs

Tracey: "They let in a large amount of noise." Richard: "They're easy to put in but difficult to remove, and they only last one wearing."



Mack's Pillow Soft

Mouldable silicone putty
£4.49 for two pairs

Richard: "By far the best noise reduction, but they get dirty very easily." Jimmy: "They're no good for the job, for us earplugs need to be removed several times a day, but I'd recommend them for motorway journeys."

