

12am Gear Review

Ultrasone 15G.... Game On!



What makes a game good to play? 'Gameplay' will be the answer all good gamers scream, but is it that simple?

Not for a long time! With the massive jump in technology over the last few years, satisfaction for gamers comes now at a much higher level. True, no game without gameplay to match, will last long or be returned too often, but we are far more inclined to take a look at some wicked new graphics, a new effect, perhaps some new feature, awesome new sound effects.. What is all this? It's what has become the golden 'rule' for hot games; atmosphere!

All games are now presented with some level of effort put into the atmosphere of the game, the whole look and feel, the music, and the sound effects - the sound.

That's what we going to look at today. Sound!

We can all cite certain turning points in gaming and for sound it has been an interesting pathway. Much of it was initially paved for us by Creative and the SoundBlaster sound cards. But it changed. The consoles arrived. CDs arrived. EAX arrived and it all began to sound so good.

We were offered oodles of new effects. Guns began to sound big, cars rumbled and footsteps behind you became part of online gaming. But has it really changed for you? What are you running your sound through? Are those PC speakers really still working? Do the neighbours bang on the wall every time you crank up your machine? Time to try some headphones. Time to try a little gem we discovered thanks to the guys at Ultrasone.

The HFI-15G

Part of what drew us to looking at headphones was the problem we were all having with our

playback at home on our systems. Mine just had shitty speakers running off an awesome 24Bit Audigy 2NX card, Andre has his wired to the house system which is useless if someone wants to watch something else, Ross's is in his little study and a 7.1 has enveloped his space with cables. We needed a way to get better sound. Obvious (but not often used) solution: headphones – good and lightweight (not a fan of heavy sets when doing a few hours). So we did some research based on our knowledge of the DJ market and sourced the **Ultrasone HFI-15G**.

The only way to test the **15Gs** was to take them home, turn down the lights and load up DOOM3. After what lead to a small house mortgage to boost my machine so DOOM just spans, I unplugged my little desk speakers and plugged in the **15Gs**.

Now DOOM is a pretty hot game anyway, but have you really heard inside? Can you hear the metal groan, the echoes, the footsteps, the howling and screaming? Oh my God I thought I had - but no! The **15Gs** changed my view on gaming and I am writing this to tell you to investigate the same. I again visited DOOM3 for what felt like the first time. But this time it was different. The sound absolutely changed the whole atmosphere of the game. The instant punchy response for the gunshots, the tiny scrapes in the corners that drew your eyes that way, the constant hum of the Mars Station and the mechanical and metal noises within, all seemed to spring to life and I was engaged..I was petrified !! It is so good through good headphones. And yes it is better than with cheap ones.

The **15Gs** allowed me to hear noises and environmental positioning that is hard to get on really top-end home systems, let alone what the PC often gets hooked into. This brings me back to the atmosphere in games. The **15Gs** not only facilitate the atmosphere, they enhance it. Because we are lucky that game-coders have been working with sound positioning for ages now, we are offered such rich environments, (be they combat FPS, racing, sport etc) that we should really be giving them more service in terms of our playback. Whether you are talking PC or console it will take a pretty hot and well balanced 5.1 or 7.1 system to be able to come even close to what you can pick up with the 15Gs. And even if you can get it pumping there is something all-engrossing when you slip on the **15Gs**. I was immersed! This was the atmosphere that ID intended, after all that has gone before. Total immersion and I found it with the **15Gs!!!**

I liked the open ears and the weight and I found the **15Gs** to be very easy to wear for extended periods. The sound whether you are playing a links golf session or supercars (awesome in supercars!) is effective at all volumes, which I enjoyed because I wasn't sure how car racing would be with the endless drone. But V8Supercars was so so good with the different noises coming from your opponents as you passed left or right or heard one

screaming up behind. It just makes all those games that were good worth going back for a look. FIFA picked up heaps of new catcalls from the crowd that I had sort of heard before but couldn't understand. The crowd and the movement of noise within the crowd added so much to what is already a great sounding soccer game.

Technically the **15Gs** come from an excellent German Audio company, Ultrasone. Supplying to both the Pro Audio market such as studios, broadcasters, and to the International DJ market indicates that the **15Gs** come from a company that focus on sound and headphones for the top end of the market. Ultrasone utilizes what they term: S-Logic Natural Surround Sound. And the best way to describe this in words (because really you should just try these headphones and trust your ears) is that with normal headphones you have the impression that the sound and music is being played in your head, while with the S-Logic **15Gs** you get a natural 3-dimensional sound, perfect for gaming.

I even tested the **15Gs** on a couple of Civilization and Age of Empires sessions and found it a really comfortable way to play. Wearing the **15Gs** stopped me getting the standard 'turn it down' from the lounge and not that it was a totally good thing but I could game on after the household had long gone to bed which has always demanded I turn the sound down. Not with my **15Gs**

The big test often comes some few weeks later when the initial buzz has gone from a new toy. Well I still have my review pair of **15Gs** and I am not giving them back !!

I also learnt a few more things over the last few weeks. They have a longer cord than most and that comes in handy. DVDs absolutely rock through the **15Gs**. The jacks are really well put together and the earpieces still feel fresh. We also checked in case the worst happens and the dog munches your earpiece or you just stuff something. You can get replacement parts direct from the Oz distributor - a great feature. There is a huge line-up of headphones with open and closed ear pieces and amazing range in pricing. Up the range from Ultrasone there is the DVD edition, the HFI-650. These are closed ears and run a fair bit of bottom end pickup which is perfect for high-end DVD users and wicked for gaming if you want to go off ! They feature some of the PRO features like fold-away ear pieces and cord extension. But they are top-end and if we can get a pair to hammer we will get back to you.

These little babies have been my pick of the month. It seemed natural. Creative Audigy 2NX, DOOM3 and my **15Gs**.

Technical Specifications:

S-Logic Natural Surround Sound

Dynamic principle
Frequency range 20-20,000 Hz
Impedance 32 ohms
Sound pressure level 90db
Weight 85g (without cord)
Cord Length approx 3m
3,5/6,3 mm gold plated plug
German Technology

For further information on the HFI-15G and all Ultrasonic Headphones:

www.eastcoastaudio.com.au

Review by Tod Wilkes for 12am.com.au Gear Media. For all enquiries, please contact Andre Cato @ andre@12am.com.au