



<https://www.themasterswitch.com/review-audeze-lcd2c>

By: Rob Boffard | Last Updated: July 04, 2018

Review: AUDEZE LCD2C

Welcome to the big leagues.



If you're an audio company, here's a super handy pro tip for how to catch our attention. Take an existing, already awesome product, and make it cheaper and more accessible, without removing what makes it good in the first place. With their new LCD2C headphones, AUDEZE did that, and they definitely got our attention – but did they succeed? In this review, we break down the LCD2C's sound, design, comfort and fit, packaging and accessories, specs and more. To see how it stacks up, see our list of the best high-end headphones.

Sound:

LCD2C SOUND QUALITY VS. LCD-2 AND LCD-4

In terms of technology, there haven't been major changes between the AUDEZE LCD2C and its predecessor, the LCD-2. The magnetic structure of the drivers has undergone a slight downgrade, and the headphones no longer contain AUDEZE's Fazor tech, which helps with resonances (and it's pronounced Aud-E-Zay, by the way). But after comparing and contrasting the two headphones, only a

fool would actually consider this a big problem. For the most part, the Classics managed to keep the soul of the sound intact.



The LCD2Cs have the same design as the original | The Master Switch

That was the biggest thing we were looking for with these new headphones, and we were chuffed to find out, from the moment we pressed play, that they hadn't forgotten where they'd come from.

You see, as good as the original LCD-2s were, they didn't get their status by looking really cool. That helped, but that was only part of the package. They got their status because they sounded absolutely fantastic. The biggest thing they had going for them was their bass: it was deep, thunderous, intensely powerful, and yet had the ability to be amazingly accurate and delicate when called upon to do so. It's why they featured highly in our list of the best high-end headphones for so long, and why they were an easy top-five pick.



The height brackets are one part of the design that doesn't work | The Master Switch

more idiosyncratic, and way out of range for most people. The LCD2 is what we need for comparison here, and Classics more than stand up to them.

Do they beat the unbelievable flagship LCD-4s, in terms of sound quality? God no. But those are headphones that are more experiment than actual everyday cans, the kind of thing a company does to see just how far it can push the envelope. Their sound quality is absolutely extraordinary - and at close to \$4,000, it had better be. But it's also heavier,

LOW-END (BASS)

Hearing the bass on a pair of AUDEZE planars for the first time is an eye-opening experience. It's not just that it sounds powerful – it's that it seems to come from everywhere, like you've taken up

residence in a booming thundercloud. It has a richness and warmth that we find addictive, and although you could argue that the Classics are perhaps just a tiny bit less defined on the low end than the original, it's the kind of thing you would have to argue very long and very hard to prove. Frankly, it just isn't worth it. These sound absolutely fantastic.

HIGH-END (TREBLE)

Admittedly, one of the other factors of the sound that hasn't changed is that the highs are still not quite as prominent as they should be. There's a weird audiophile term that gets thrown around a lot: veiled. It's shorthand for "There's not a lot of detail." Although we wish that this and all other audiophile slang would go back to the 1970s where it belongs, there's also a grain of truth to it. If you find yourself listening to music that doesn't have a huge amount of low-frequency content, like violin concertos or folk, then these might not be the headphones for you. If that is what you listen to, then perhaps Sir or Madam would be happier with a pair of equally-brilliant Sennheiser HD600s?



For the rest of us, these remain among the best-sounding headphones available. They are certainly the best-sounding cans you can get for under \$1,000. Compare them to something like the similarly priced AudioQuest NightHawk Carbon (full review here) – which previously held the title – and they are definitely superior. We love the Carbons, but we'd be crazy to say they are better than the LCD2Cs.

The sound of the LCD2Cs is killer, as you'd expect | The Master Switch

Design:

LCD2C DESIGN VS. LCD-2



The original LCD-2 was released in 2009, and it is legendary. That word gets overused a lot in the audio world, but it's entirely justifiable here. The LCD-2 is a pair of headphones that sold by the truckload, despite costing well over \$1,000; it remains one of the best planar magnetic headphones of all time. Planar magnetic, by the way, refers to the driver type found in the headphones - it's known to give wider and more precise sound than dynamic drivers, which are typically but not always found on cheaper models. The bigger and

Good to know... | The Master Switch

far more expensive LCD-4 (over \$3,000 - compared to the LCD2C's \$779) may technically be “better” - in the sense that it offers more pinpoint audio performance - but you only have to look at the sales figures to see which one most people prefer.

But of course, it's 2018, not 2009, and planar magnetic technology has moved on a little bit. It's no longer nearly as expensive as it once was – models like the Monoprice Monolith M1060 (full review here) offer planar tech for under \$300 – and that means that the company has had to consistently innovate to keep up. The LCD2C - or LCD2 Classic – is a stripped down version of the original LCD-2, new for 2018. It costs \$200 less than the current retail price of the original, and it manages to pull off a tricky balancing act of keeping what made that original so good while ditching everything that might raise the cost. (And by the way, just in case you think we've been a little sloppy with the editing: the original LCD-2 contains a dash in its name, while the LCD2C does not. Don't ask us.)



The LCD2Cs have an excellent braided cable | The Master Switch

differences. Small things, but ones which have managed to knock a couple hundred off the price. Give these people a beer.

So what are the differences? The famed travel case is gone. Cans from AUDEZE have always come in a very sleek hard plastic case, resembling those used by professional musicians to protect their instruments. That's out the window. Ditto for the wooden housing, which was one of the more distinctive features of the original. It's been replaced by tough plastic. There's a new headband, designed to help with the issues that the previous model experienced. And...well, really, that's it. Them's the

BUILD QUALITY



Welcome back! | The Master Switch

What you still get is the distinctive shape, with the familiar subtle pattern on the outer surfaces and the giant, Princess-Leia-lookin' housings, each of which holds 106mm drivers. You get the same squashy cups, and the same clicky-clacky adjustment brackets. And you know what? It's a design that works. It worked in 2009, and it works now. The build quality here is just stellar: robust enough to stand up to a bit of abuse, while still looking appropriately refined. Compare that to a pair of \$1,300 Sennheiser HD800s, and tell us which

one you'd prefer to hold in your hands. Sure, it would have been nice to have the wood, but it's hardly essential to the overall package. This is a headphone line that has one of the most recognisable shapes in the audio world, and it's a joy to experience a new version of it.

Comfort & Fit:

HEADBAND AND WEIGHT

The biggest question we had, before we even plug the headphones in, was whether the new headband would work as intended. One of the biggest issues that the original LCD-2 had was that it was uncomfortable. For starters, it was heavy - 1.1lbs – and the new Classic weighs the same. That can cause problems over long periods, and one of the most common complaints about the original model was that it was tough to wear for long periods. The new suspension headband, with a leather band held underneath the rigid metal frame, is designed to combat that. And it works...kind of.



A close look at the new suspension band | The Master Switch

Although we felt we could wear these for longer than the original, that doesn't mean they were super comfortable to wear. There was nothing wrong with the actual pressure on our ears – the clamping pressure and cup size were absolutely fine – but there's no doubt that these started getting awfully heavy after a little while. While we respect the attempt to solve the problem here, it just doesn't work as well as it should. There's not

enough flex in the band to really support extended listening. In this, AUDEZE could maybe take lessons from another similarly-capitalized brand, Romania's MEZE. Their 99 Classics have a similar design, with a headband suspended beneath the metal frame. Admittedly, they weigh a lot less, but there's no saying that AUDEZE couldn't draw from those principles.

HEIGHT BRACKETS

Also, and we just have to say this: the height adjustment brackets are clunky and annoying and stupid and we hate them. They are murder to move, feel imprecise – despite having rigid slots – and just generally make themselves known as the most annoying part of the package. Which is a shame. It's also worth noting that apocryphal reports of driver failure and quality issues occasionally pop up on online discussion boards; we can't vouch for the truth of any of these claims, and we've certainly never had an issue with any products the company has sent us. On balance, you can probably take these with a grain of salt.

Accessories & Packaging:

PACKAGING



The LCD2C loses the hard travel case of the original | The Master Switch

eBay – at the time of writing, we didn't see any, but you could definitely keep an eye out).

You already know about the lack of a hard travel case. If that bothers you, then you can easily spend a little bit more and buy the older version - or just pick up a spare on Amazon, at under \$100. What you need to know is that with the Classics, there is no case. The cardboard box it comes in simply has shaped foam inserts included, which hold the headphones and accessories. Once you pull it out, you're on your own (although second-hand cases do occasionally pop up on

ACCESSORIES

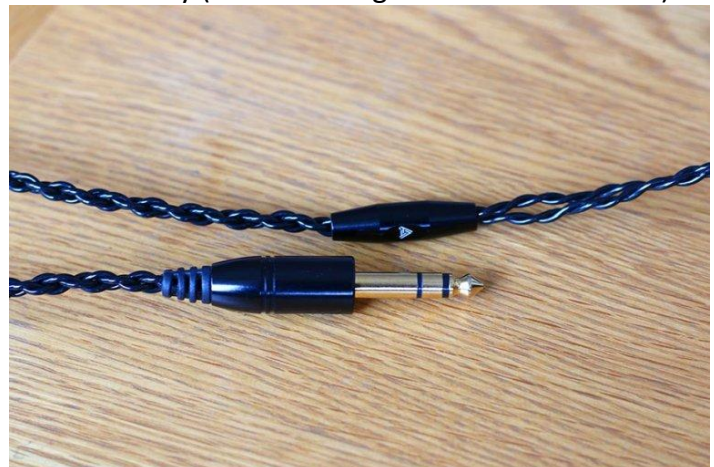


Paper manuals? Who needs 'em? | The Master Switch

It beats the pants off the Sennheiser PXC 550 (for example. We don't need a fold-out paper manual in multiple languages, half of which is filled with warnings about electrical safety.

What you do get is an absolutely fantastic braided cable, which looks and feels really cool. The Y bracket is a little pill-shaped piece of metal with the company logo front and centre, and the two ends terminate in mini-XLR connections clip that slide into the headphones with a pleasing click. You also get a branded USB stick, containing all the necessary documentation – no manuals here – as well as a warranty card detailing quality checks performed on headphones.

We are vastly in favor of this method of manual delivery (what a strange sentence to write...).



We really like the LCD2C's cable | The Master Switch

What We Like:

- The LCD2Cs retain AUDEZE’s legendary sound quality, at a much lower price.
- The headphones still have the distinctive shape and profile that made the original so successful.
- The accessories are excellent, and the cable is still one of the best we’ve used.

What We Don’t:

- The LCD2Cs height adjustment brackets are still very difficult to use, and need some major improvements.
- The headband doesn’t really relieve the comfort issues that were present in the LCD-2.
- The lack of wood cups and a hard travel case may be a problem for some.



The LCD2Cs maintain some of the goodness from their predecessors | The Master Switch

HEADPHONES	PRICE	IMPEDANCE	SENSITIVITY	DRIVERS	TYPE	WEIGHT
AUDEZE LCD2C	\$779	70Ω	101dB	106mm	Planar	1.1lbs
AudioQuest NightHawk Carbon	\$568	25Ω	99dB	50mm	Dynamic	12.2oz
Focal Clear	\$1,499	55Ω	104dB	40mm	Dynamic	1lb
Monoprice Monolith M1060	\$299	50Ω	96dB	106mm	Planar	1.1lbs
AUDEZE SINE	\$449	20Ω	120dB	70mm	Planar	11.3oz

The Competition

If for some reason you don't want to experience this world-beating pair of headphones, we've got some alternatives for you. The first are the AudioQuest NightHawk Carbons. Unfortunately, AudioQuest recently announced they were pulling back from the headphones business, so if you're reading this in the future, they may not be on sale. At the time of writing, they still very much are, and we think they're a worthy alternative. With a similarly bassy sound signature, and design that is just as distinctive, this remains one of our favorite pairs of headphones. It's slightly cheaper than the Classics (\$568 at the time of writing, to the Classics' \$779), and although the sound isn't quite as refined, it's still an absolutely unbelievable pair of cans. Also lighter, and more comfy to wear for long periods. And it must be said, the accessories – multiple cables, cleaning cloth, leather case – are much better than those offered with the LCD2Cs. They look cool, sound great, and are in every way an excellent alternative.

Then there's the Focal Clear. Damn, these are fly. If you want a pair of headphones that have a much more balanced sound signature, with a lot more detail in the high-end, these are the ones you go for. They both look and sound fantastic, maintaining the reputation of Focal's headphone line. Of course, they are also quite a bit more expensive than the LCD2Cs - try \$1,499 to the latter's \$779. They also don't have design that is quite as distinctive, being virtually identical to the cheaper Elears (which cost \$747 as we write this). All the same, there's very little to complain about here, especially if you have the money to spend.



A NightHawk Carbon and a 99 Classic, in repose | The Master Switch

Want to experience planar tech? Don't have the moolah to drop on a pair of AUDEZEs? Then the Monoprice Monolith M1060 should be your first port of call. With a similar design and a sound signature that is on nodding terms with the LCD2Cs, all for under \$300, there's very little to complain about. However, you can expect minimal accessories, and build quality that could charitably be described as basic. We do like the M1060s, but they come with big caveats.

And finally, if you want something a little bit different that still bears the AUDEZE logo - something a little more portable perhaps? - then check out the SINE headphones. They are cheaper than the LCD2Cs by \$300, at \$449, and have a design and build quality that is a little lighter and less robust, but they do have one excellent trick. They combine planar magnetic technology with a highly portable frame, and even come with a specialised cable that includes an amp and DAC. It's a very good look.

Let's return to the LCD2C, briefly. We don't give out Editor's Choice awards very often here. They tend to be awarded for one of two things: products which genuinely push audio forward, or those which provide existing tech for a much more reasonable price, without sacrificing too much. If that sounds like it's easy to pull off, it isn't – as MEZE themselves found out with their 99 Neos, a stripped down



Slim connectors mean you need to be careful with insertion | The Master Switch

version of the 99 Classics that left us suggesting that everybody just buy the originals in the first place. But here, AUDEZE have genuinely nailed it. They dropped the price by enough to matter - by \$200, or around a fifth of what the originals cost. They kept the parts of the product that made the original so good – the sound quality, the shape, the terrific cable. They may not have completely dealt with the criticisms of the original, but those are very

minor points. And we keep coming back to the fact that they really achieved what they set out to do: produce a new version of a genuine classic, and introduce it to a new audience.



This isn't a reboot. It's a revolution: an adjustment to changing tastes and smaller wallets. And here at this site, we are very much in favour of anything that lets more people through the door, that lowers the barrier to entry and allows everyone to experience what hardcore audiophiles already know to be good. There are smart ways to do it, and there are dumb ways to do it, and this is very much in the former category. In our opinion, this is one of the best pairs of headphones available on the market today, and although we might catch quite a bit of flack for this, it's one of the best models that AUDEZE have ever made. AUDEZE stuck the landing. They kept everything we liked, and made it cheaper. And for under a grand, nothing sounds as good as these.