

Top-Tier Universal IEM Chart by average_joe - updated 5/01/10

IEM	MSRP	Street \$, US	What It Does Better Than Any Other	Sonic Strengths	Sonic Weaknesses	Sound Sig	Ergonomics/Fit	Notes	DAP/amp synergy	Support Top-Tier Status
EARSonics SM3 (triple BA)	\$425	\$425	Bass power, speed, reverb, and detail; effortless dynamics; best soundstage/space; transparency (see notes)	Speed; detail; very deep bass with ultimate power; great overall space; very resolving; very transparent		Warm, full sound with great space and accurate reproduction of the mic location	Great isolation; Over the ear, monitor style. Deep tips gives better bass, shallow tips more treble. Only tips included are 2 pair of the same size comply	Equal to or better than the other IEMs at everything! Sensitive to recording quality, which can bring out the best or worst of a recording	Very sensitive; easy to drive	Zeo, average_joe, KLS
JVC/Victor FX700 (dynamic)		\$332	Timbre, Best dynamic lower half of the spectrum	Great clarity and detail across the spectrum; exceptional bass; very good space and soundstage	Upper mids on up not as good as the Copperm, but still extremely good	Slightly warm with good treble extension and mids that are inline with the rest of the spectrum; enhanced bass and treble	Poor isolation; Longer nozzle than the FX500; Easy to wear both over the ear and cables down		Easy to drive	James444
Monster Cable Turbine Pro Copper (dynamic)	\$400	\$220	Best dynamic upper half of the spectrum	bass; balanced presentation; smooth and extended treble, instrument separation for a dynamic	Transparency very dependent on fit; dynamics are diminished at low volume, low sensitivity	Balanced/slightly warm; smooth yet detailed	Many report stock tips don't give the best fit/sound, some say too heavy	PFE tips balance the sound, audio tips work for many (Radio Shack); durability issues?	Most sources; improves considerably with an amp	zeluiz22
Monster Cable Turbine Pro Gold (dynamic)	\$300	\$200	N/A	Detailed highs, great bass, good instrument separation		slightly forward intimate mids that are detailed, strong bass that is accurate and only present when the music has bass	Many report stock tips don't give the best fit/sound, some say too heavy	Very comfortable to wear	Most sources; improves with an amp	dweaver, tstarn06, Stereointegrity
Monster Cable Miles Davis (dynamic)	\$400	\$300		Balanced and doesn't do anything "wrong"; very good mids for instruments	Bass control	Mid forward	Smaller and deeper insertion than the Copper or Gold	Least bling looking of the MC IEMs	Most sources; improves with an amp	the search never ends, knobbe, cn11
Ortofon e-Q7 (Moving Armature)	\$429	\$320	Transparency; near perfect overall music presentation	Bass and mids are top notch, detail and accuracy	Treble sometimes not on par with the rest of the spectrum (less smoothness); slightly grainy	Slightly mid forward presentation; perfectly integrated bass and treble; more treble and less bass than the GR8; similar to the CK10	Many report serious fit issues due to size and shape of housing and short nozzle	Similar to the GR8 (per ClieOS, the GR8 and e-Q7 do not have the same driver, but same family of drivers)	Improve with an amp, especially in the treble region	the search never ends, grokit, Pianist
Grado GR8 (Moving Armature)	\$299	\$299	Transparency; near perfect overall music presentation	Exceptional mids and treble, very revealing; great space when driven with a very good source	Treble can seem a little recessed directly out of some DAPs (Fuze/Clip)	Mid forward presentation similar to the SE530, as smooth/smooth (amp dependent) and with more coherency across the spectrum	Easy to fit in the ear	Similar to the E-Q7, but not as bright	Improve with an amp, especially in the treble region; SR-71	Spyro, dongrino, thebasso, Zeo, Woody469
Sennheiser IE8 (dynamic)	\$499	\$280	Soundstage width (which is a close 2nd to the SM3, but not as 3D)	Soundstage and mid/treble smoothness; micro-detail/sense of space; timbre; excellent preservation of sound sig at low volume	Veiled mids (due to mid-bass) compared to others in this category, isolation, fit with stock tips	Laid back with A LOT of mid-bass warmth and extended treble; very smooth	Some have reported that the stock tips do not work for them; removable cable	Tip extender mod improves transparency and space, bring the mids forward a little, and reduced the mid-bass hump slightly for average_joe	Vivid V1, Icon Mobile, D10 with Top Kit	HONEYBOY, Stereointegrity, midoo1990, gameboy115, dj nellie, iponderous, Pianist
Audio Technica CK10 (dual BA)	\$400	\$210	Imaging (which is 2nd to the SM3, as the SM3 has a much larger space)	detail; space; instrument separation; micro-detail; accuracy; easy to drive	treble isn't quite as smooth as some of the others (and there is a treble focus)	Up close presentation with a treble focus with exceptional detail and imaging/space	included tips, can be difficult to fit (or uncomfortable); very small, but round shape doesn't protrude into your ears	Deeper extending tips increase the bass (MC triple flange); many interpret the bass to be light due to short reverb time even though it extends a very audible	Any, very easy to drive	tstarn06, bcpl, gerranturkey, rawrster, mp3, AudioDwebe, javajive, AwakenedBeing, jjokey
Audio Technica CK100 (triple BA)	\$564	\$392	Highs	Ultra refined highs, great soundstage and imaging, airy live feeling	Mids are colored (coldish) and can be hit or miss for personal taste	Forward mids		Source can dramatically change the sound of the mids	Very source dependent (can sound phenomenal or horrible depending on source)	
Westone UM3X (triple BA)	\$379	\$350	Neutral presentation	Accurate reproduction of music, instrument separation	Not the most dynamic and has a small soundstage	Neutral, mid-forward, warm				TC01975, playingwithfire, gameboy115, dj nellie, Young Spade, Pianist, stuzide
Westone W3 (triple BA)	\$399	\$399?	N/A	Good instrument separation	Warmth can reduce the perceived detail, soundstage is just average, sibilance with poor fit	Warm presentation similar to the IE8 but more mid forward	Can be sibilant without the right tips. Triple flange with the last flange cut off work for many	More refined TF10?		ChunkO, dj nellie, Pianist
Ultimate Ears Triple.fi 10 (triple BA)	\$400	\$200	N/A	bass and treble detail; bass presentation; good soundstage/space	mids recessed and a little veiled ; treble borders on sibilant	Very warm presentation with recessed mids and extended treble (V shaped)	Many have reported fit issues due to large size; removable cable	Null audio cable brings the mids in line with the rest of the spectrum	Shadow, iPhone 3G/3GS, iPod Classic 7g	iponderus, HONEYBOY, ThePandemonium, Young Spade, dj nellie, Hentail11, Ra97oR, mark2410
HiFiMan RE252 (dynamic)	\$199	\$199	N/A	detail and space (but to a lesser extend and in a different way than the CKs)	fit, can sound boring at times	Balanced with a slight upper mid/lower treble peak	Ear guides can make it difficult to get a good seal for those with larger ear canal openings	some may perceive it to be bass lite	Arrow (bass boost)	
Etymotic Research ER4S/P (single BA)	\$299	\$175	Isolation, "detail retrieval"	Speed, detail	bass reverb	Analytical, uncoloured		Stock cable has bad microphonics, lacks enough bass for some	Scales very well with source	semisight, HONEYBOY, bcpl, ThePandemonium, Bennyboy71, Ra97oR
Shure SE530 (triple BA)	\$549	\$330	N/A	Great mids, bass tone, sense of space	Treble extension lacking; exaggerated sibilance depending on tips	Very forward mids	Cable issues (new SE535 will have a removable cable)			Stereointegrity, dj nellie, mark2410, Pianist
EarSonics SM2 (dual BA)	\$336/ \$381	\$336/ \$381		Speed; detail; clean and profound bass (not boomy); Sharp, warm, and long medium; precised treble	Not the fastest; if you are going to spend this much, you may as well get the SM3, which is superior!	emphasis on detail in the lows and mids with smooth highs (studio monitor)		Well made; 2nd price for delux model with better cable	Best when amped	Zeo

Phiaton PS200 (Dual Micro BA)	\$250	\$170		Naturally balanced mids; crisp and detailed treble	Soundstage short front-to-back and top-to-bottom	Treble focus with exceptional detail (less bass than the CK10, but better soundstage width)	Great build quality	From MaoDi's review; similar to the CK10 but wider stage and less bass		mp3, 12345142
Borderline Top-Tier and/or Top-Tier After Modding										
IEM	MSRP	Street \$, US	What It Does Better Than Any Other	Sonic Strengths	Sonic Weaknesses	Sound Sig	Ergonomics/Fit	Notes	DAP/amp synergy	Support Top-Tier Status
JVC/Victor FX500 (dynamic)		\$145	N/A	Natural timbre; bass texturing/detail; treble detail	treble sharpness; mids not inline with bass and treble; performs best at low volume	V shaped frequency response with a wide soundstage	Angled nozzle is fairly easy to fit	Foam mod greatly improves the treble harshness	Most sources, improves with an amp	midoo1990 (unmodded), Hentail11, chinese444, james444 (modded)
Audio Technica CK90Pro (dual BA)	\$280	\$200	N/A	Detail, space, instrument separation, more accepted frequency response balance	very dark, yet with harsh treble (before foam mod), bass is powerful, yet has fast decay making some rap/hip-hop type bass sound not right	(after foam removed/reduced) Nearly as detailed of a presentation as the CK10, but with a warmer presentation	Easy to get a good fit and seal, but only the stock foam worked for average_joe	Need to either completely remove the foam, or remove the foam, cut 1/4th of it off and put it back in the nozzle	Any, very easy to drive	average_joe, a_recording
Panasonic HJE900 (dynamic)	\$230	\$110								
Head-Direct RE0	\$199	\$79		Exceptional treble and very good mids	While the bass has quality, the quantity can be interpreted as lacking; soundstage is small	Mid forward		See Pianist's mod in post 390 in this thread		Pianist (modded)
Under Consideration but Need More Information										
Fischer DBA-02 (dual BA)		\$158								
Not Yet Released, but Possible Top-Tier IEMs										
Jays x-Jays (quad BA)										
Equipment Owned by People Voting for Top-Tier Status										
Name	Own/In Possession				Previously Owned/Extended Audition			Auditioned		
Average_joe	CK10, CK90Pro, RE252, MTP Copper, e-Q7, GR8, FX700, SM3				FX500, TF10, MD, MTP Gold, IE8			W3, UM3X, SE530, ER4S/P		
playingwithfire	W3, UM3X				TF10, MTP Gold					
james444	IE8, e-Q7, CK100, SE530, FX500, CK10, FX700							RE252		
midoo1990	IE8, FX500				CK10					
ChunkO	W3, UM3X				IE8					
dweaver	MTP Gold				IE8					
Hentail11	TF10, FX500, SE530, IE8, MTP Gold									
iponderous	IE8, TF10P, SE530				UM3X, FX500					
the search never ends	e-Q7, MTP MD, Copper, Gold, UM3X, IE8, FX500, TF10, RE252									
ben4345	N/A							e-Q7, GR8, W3		
Ra97oR	TF10 (Null Audio Enyo Silver + Sony Hybrids)				IE8, SE530, ER4S					
germanturkey	CK10				IE8, TF10					
mark2410	SE530, TF10, IE8, RE252, FX500				e-Q7					
JeFFz	Copper				TF10					
dongringo	GR8				W3, IE8, e-Q7					
Stereointegrity	IE8, Copper									
mvw2										
knubble	Miles Davis				IE8					
mp3	CK10, PS200									
a_recording	CK90Pro, RE252									
rawrster	e-Q7, CK10				TF10					
tstarn06	Gold, ER4P, Copper				IE8, W3, UM3X, CK10, TF10 (stock & reshelled), RE252					
thebasso	GR8									
ericp10	e-Q7, Copper, IE8				SE530					
AudioDwebe	IE8, CK10, CK100				ER4B, ER4P/S, SE530/E500					
Zeo	GR8, SM2, SM3									
12345142	PS200							SE530, IE8		
javajive	CK10, FX500							E-q7, Se530, TF10. IE8, CK100, ER4P, CK90Pro (unmodded) and FX700		
AwakenedBeing	CK10, CK100				ER4P/S, TF10, Copper					
grokit	e-Q7				TF10					
Young Spade	UM3X				TF10 (recabled)					