

# GUN TODAY, HEAR TOMORROW

Ear defenders are an absolute must when shooting. Are the high-tech new CENS ProFlex+ DX5 in-ear devices up to the job? **Paul Pettengale** plugs them in

**H**ow much is your hearing worth? Have a really good think about it. I've lost count of the number of clay shooters (many of them also game shooters, I hasten to point out) that refuse to wear hearing protection when shooting. Most of them over the age of 60 have suffered significant damage to their hearing, especially when background ambient noise (in a restaurant or bar) is taken into account. Those of us who value the ability to hear into our old age invest in proper hearing protection for when we're out busting clays.

But how much to spend? Pop to your local gun shop or hardware store and you can pick up a pair of simple over-ear defenders for as little as ten quid. Yes, they will protect your hearing to some degree, but without the electronic trickery of modern devices you'll not be able to hear anything going on or being said around you. Not ideal by any means.

At the other end of the spectrum, for those who are willing to dig deep, are the state-of-the-art in-ear electronic protectors as used by the pros. And attempting to find a perch at the top of that particular tree are the new CENS ProFlex+ DX5. Starting at £699 with the standard listen-only neck loop (as an optional extra you can get an SRC communication harness for full two-way comms), these custom-fitted ear pieces are not cheap. But they are astounding at achieving the job they've been crafted to perform.

Let's start with the fitting... this is a 15-minute job at most, involving a quick-setting silicone impression material injected into your ear cavity. Sounds horrible, but it's painless (just a slightly strange sensation). With the impression of the inside of your ears taken you can go about the business of choosing from the



When it comes to protecting your hearing, it is worth investing in quality

myriad colours and options available. My fitting took place at the Great British Shooting Show courtesy of dealer Plugzz, though if you contact Puretone it can advise you as to where to get your impressions taken.

The DX5s are tailored to your every whim, and the range of colour options and combinations really is vast. I went for the neon yellow, thinking they'd be easy to spot should they be dropped. The time between the impressions being taken and the earpieces arriving in their rather splendid packaging varies. In my case it was about two weeks before the package was delivered, which seemed entirely justifiable given these things were made for me specifically, right down to my name being laser etched into the insides of the devices.

I've tried in-ear defenders before but have never been particularly taken with them. Although fine at first, they swiftly become uncomfortable, especially on hot days. So to date I've generally stuck with my trusty 3M

Peltor SportTac over-ear devices, which have served me well for years both on the clay ground and in the field. Having spent a serious amount of time with the DX5s, I can assure the Peltors will be consigned to the spares box.

The level of comfort with the CENS devices is such that you really don't notice they're there. The dual silicone earpieces, which are finished with a matt antibacterial coating, glide into the ear with a slight twist and are secured with a cord that slips over your head in case one is dislodged (though during testing was this was not once needed). They're extremely easy to set up; just pop one of the supplied batteries into each ear device and you're ready to go. A swift press of the minute power button at the top of each earpiece will initialise them, with a female voice informing you which of the five modes the devices are currently in.

There are Game Clay, Range, Wireless Comms and Hunter modes, with the unit remembering the last mode you picked. These



A matt coating helps the silicone model slide into the ear easier than a gloss-finished product

speak for themselves (literally) with differing audio profiles for each. The Game mode works especially well when you're trying to listen to voice commands that are coming from some way off, as is often the case when shooting quarry. Ambient sounds are amplified just as efficiently as the sharp crack of a fired shotgun is crisply muted. The Clay mode, which most of the readers of this magazine will be interested in, does its job very well. You can still hear what's going on around you – your tutor's instructions, for instance, or the 'friendly' banter of your fellow shooters – but the earpieces do a fantastic job of cutting out the excessive (and usually wearing) noise of shells being repeatedly fired. Given that most clay shooters fire upwards of 100 cartridges in a session, the DX5s prove themselves to be invaluable in their unobtrusiveness.

If you shoot rifles as well as shotguns then the Range and Hunter modes will be of interest. The former is designed for use with small bore centrefire and rimfire weapons and the latter is the one you'll switch to when out stalking deer

and the like. All modes are accessed using a small toggle switch on the side of each earpiece that doubles up as a volume control. Usefully, the DX5s remember the last mode and volume setting you've used and will fire up accordingly the next time you turn them on.

I'm going to return to the complete package, if I may, because a pair of CENS DX5s are far more than a couple of devices shoved into a jiffy bag. Take a look at the photographs on these pages. The box the devices come in, the additional protective packaging – everything about the DX5s just oozes class and gives the impression of absolute robustness. The accessory list is no less impressive. From the simple belt clip on the back of the carry case, through the cleaning tools, gels and wipes, to the 12 pairs of batteries supplied (enough for around 4,800 hours' continual use), this ensemble makes you realise just why these hearing protectors don't come cheap. They're not just made for you, they're designed to last you a lifetime, and if well maintained and looked

## TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

### MAKER

CENS

### MODEL

CENS ProFlex DX5

### TYPE

Personalised digital in-ear defenders

### MODES

Game, Clay, Range, Wireless Comms, Hunting

### MATERIALS

Dual silicone earpieces with Water-Shield Nano-Coating water repellent

### BATTERY LIFE

One size 13 battery per earpiece with around 400 hours working life

### TECHNOLOGY

Digital DSP, voice feedback, wind noise reduction, volume and mode autosave

### PERSONALISATION

Earpieces individually moulded, vast range of colour combination options, personalised engraving

### COST

From £699, depending on chosen options

### FROM

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“They're not just made for you, they're designed to last you a lifetime”

after I have absolutely no doubt they'll do just that. A two-year warranty will see you through any initial teething troubles, should they crop up.

So, what value do you, as a regular shooter, put on your hearing? I'd suggest that this £699 is a very good starting point, and an investment you'll fully appreciate in the long term. ●



The array of accessories include cleaning gear, gels, wipes and 12 pairs of batteries