

Hands-free kits

NEED TO KNOW

Hands-free kits save you having to hold your phone. They're essential if you want to use your phone in the car because the law forbids holding a mobile phone while driving. Around 15 people a month are prosecuted for doing so.

There are three main types of kit. The simplest (not tested) comes with many mobiles as standard. It's an earphone or earphones on a wire that you attach to the phone.

Car kits plug into your car's cigarette lighter and let you talk hands-free, while Bluetooth headsets look a bit like a hearing aid and rest on your ear. They have a microphone for your voice and one earphone. They work wirelessly with Bluetooth phones within a range of about 5m to 20m.

BEST BUYS

We tested three car kits and five Bluetooth headsets – and found only one to recommend, the **Jabra (1)** Bluetooth headset, £60 from The Carphone Warehouse. Two words sum up our verdict on the car kits: don't buy. All three of them suffered from poor sound quality.

We recommend that you try on any Bluetooth headset before you buy, if possible, as fit is important to whether you'll use it. We gave our headsets to six readers with different ear sizes and asked them to rate them for comfort. Taking the average score of each headset, the Jabra was equal best with the Sony Ericsson (2). However, both headsets were given scores as low as ● and as high as ☆ by different readers, and there wasn't a clear link between comfort rating and size of ear. This shows just how important it is to try before you buy.

The Jabra has the best sound of all the Bluetooth headsets, although none has fantastic sound quality.

The incoming sound to the headset's earphone (what you hear coming from the person you're talking to) is good and clear. The outgoing sound transmitted by the headset's microphone (your speech going to the person you're talking to) is tinny with slight background noise, but it's still OK.

DON'T BUY

Avoid all three car kits that we tested: sound quality is poor.

The Siemens (6) sounds awful when you're driving and outgoing speech is garbled and unclear.

The Pama (7) and Kondor (8) car kits were worse. Speech through the Kondor is hard to understand. The Pama has an annoying buzz.

SCORE

For Bluetooth headsets, this ignores price and is based on:

Sound	40%
Ease of use and comfort	30%
Features and battery life	30%

1 Jabra
HEADSET

DON'T BUY

8 Kondor
CAR KIT

KEY

★ ☆ ○ ● ●
Best Worst
■ Best Buy ■ Don't Buy

SCORE

For car kits, this ignores price and is based on:

Sound	90%
Charger	10%

TABLE NOTES

We tested the best-selling Bluetooth headsets and car kits on the market.

Specification

Range In good, open conditions with no obstacles, the headset will work if the phone is within this range. **Battery** Combination of standby and talktime use.

Charger Compatible phones can be charged while driving.

Performance

Comfort The average rating given by six people with different ear sizes.

Sound

Out How your speech sounds to the person that you're talking to. **In** How the person you talk to sounds.

Bluetooth headsets

MODEL

	Specification			Performance			Sound		Score
	Price (£)	Range (m)	Battery (hours)	Comfort	Features	Ease of use	Out	In	(%)
1 Jabra BT 250v	60	12	120	○	☆	☆	○	☆	64
2 Sony Ericsson Akono HBH-660	100	20	72	○	☆	☆	●	○	53
3 Belkin F8T061	60	13.5	72	●	○	☆	○	○	51
4 Plantronics M2500	40	5.5	72	●	○	○	○	○	49
5 Nokia HDW-3	80	13.5	48	●	●	○	●	○	40

Car kits

MODEL

	Specification			Sound		Score
	Price (£)	Phones	Charger	Out	In	(%)
6 Siemens HKP-620^a	54	Siemens	✓	●	●	33
7 Pama Plug 'N' Go Roadster	40	up to 51mm wide		●	○	23
8 Kondor Uni Talk	20	up to 58mm wide		●	●	11

^a X, C, V/T/I, M, S, SL models only