

Closed Society

Focal wants to take the lead – also with closed headphones.

Will the exquisitely crafted „Stellia“ succeed?

Michael Lang

**The joy
already
starts while
unpacking**

KEYWORD

Diffuser

Acoustic-mechanical device for the uniform distribution of sound components

With the introduction of the „Utopia“ headphones, the loudspeaker manufacturer Focal succeeded in a rare feat: to right away conquer the top position in a segment that was still very new to the French company.

Now, the brand-new „Stellia“ also wants to stir up the established scene. It belongs to the category of closed back headphones, as they are often used in recording studios, and should take pole position in this category, like its utopian brother did for the segment of open back headphones. Why would you even need closed back headphones for use outside recording studios, you may ask? Well, many people don't have a retreat to indulge their hobby of music. Then, it is an advantage to have as little as possible of the sound penetrate to the outside world in order to leave roommates undisturbed. Vice versa the world with its many distracting noises cannot interfere with the music as much when using a closed back specimen. The French have come up with some ideas to make the inherent disadvantages of the closed concept a thing of the past.

Luxury wherever you look

The Stellia asserts its claim to be a member of the luxury class as soon as it is unpacked. Whether it's the accessory box or the transport case made of imitation leather – the vocabulary that most readily comes to mind



has to be “noble”. The workmanship is even more opulent. The French describe their color choice with the words „cognac and mocha finish“ – as a man who has been proven to know only very few colors, one would probably speak of powerful, warm brown tones. Stainless steel for the temple, perforated leather upholstery with memory foam and high-quality plug connections for the cable complete the very positive first impressions.

The geometry of the cushions, as well as the air volume, is designed precisely for the purpose of the patented, M-shaped beryllium dome. Behind the drivers is a porous acoustic foam that absorbs excess high frequency energy and uses its **diffuser** properties to break standing waves in order to achieve a natural and open canal pattern. Heat build-up and the often unsatisfactory and booming bass reproduction with closed headphones are, now, also a thing of the past, one assures. Another shortcoming of closed back types usually was their dynamic abilities. Here, the use of a carrier less voice coil made of copper is supposed to have a beneficial

effect. In combination with high efficiency and low impedance, all these advantages should also come into their own when used with mobile devices. To ensure production at a constantly high level, the Focal specialists have developed an intelligent robot, resulting in a pair equivalence of +/- 0.5 dB.

Dynamic fireworks

Important for the desired result are also the high-quality cables – for stationary use there is a three meter long model, which is equipped with a symmetrical plug, for mobile devices there is a half as long version with a small jack in the accessories.

After a fitting break-in period, the noble Frenchman was able to fascinate the audience with its sound. The attention for detail, the ability to reproduce even the finest sounds of the saxophone in several perfectly balanced nuances in the „Pink Panther Theme“ has to be experienced. Compared to many other high-quality headphones, it is as if more notes were played at the same time, as the Stellia clearly chisels out details. However, it doesn't leave it at musical nitpicking, but convinces just as much if not more with dynamic challenges as „Keith Don't Go“ – a song that we have, in fact, heard far too often at this point. It is nevertheless extraordinary how emphatically Mr. Lofgren sings and maltreats his guitar on this not quite audiophile recording. Although it might be a challenge, you have to be careful not to tap the cables with the beat, as this unfortunately creates disturbing background noises

Focal Stellia

Price: around 3000 €
Warranty: 2 years
Contact: Focal
 www.focal.com

An extraordinary closed back headphone with outstanding workmanship and exquisite features. The beryllium diaphragm is just one detail leading to the outstanding performance of this luxury headphone.

Lab Comment

impedance 35 Ohm, efficiency 106 dB; weight: 440 gram

Features

Closed back, dynamic headphone; exchangeable cable; unfortunately sensitive to microphony; padded earpiece, soft leather pads with memory foam; high wearing comfort

STEREO - TEST	
SOUND QUALITY	95%
PRICE/PERFORMANCE	
★ ★ ★ ★ ☆	
EXCELLENT	

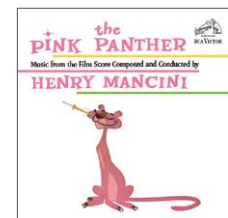
– something Focal should revisit in the future. On the other hand there's absolutely nothing to complain about with the usually most difficult discipline for closed headphones: bass reproduction. Lightning fast and clean, with realistic mediation of swinging fur, a drum in „The Fokie“ by the Chieftains is depicted – great. Even complex sounds of all kinds do not seem to be any obstacle, are, instead, presented in a clean and detailed manner and make time with the Stellia an exclusive experience. ■



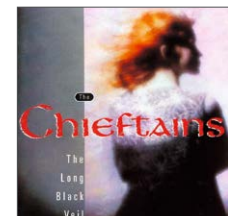
Synthetic leather case and noble box for cables and instructions. The Stellia is elegant!

WHAT WE'VE HEARD

Henry Mancini: Pink Panther



One of THE film music classics. Should be a part of every collection.



Chieftains: The Long Black Veil

The Chieftains, supported by high-class guest musicians, in top form.