Beats Studio Pro review: Apple's new top headphones love Android too

Hot on the heels of some great new earbuds, Apple's Beats brand is back with an update to the headphones that made it a hit all the way back in 2008, the Studio Pro. The new Beats headphones cost £349.99 ($349.99) and are the fourth generation of the Studio line launched by Dr Dre 15 years ago, replacing 2017's Studio 3 Wireless. They are Apple's second most expensive Bluetooth headphones after the £549 AirPods Max but, as with other recent Beats kit, they court Android users as much as those with an iPhone. Similar to the recent Studio Buds+ earbuds, the headphones support advanced features across Android and iOS, something no other brand is capable of doing. Pairing syncing across iCloud or Google devices means you only have to pair once with each platform, and they can be found with either Apple or Google's Find My systems if you lose them. The headphones also have hands-free Siri with an iPhone, while they directly integrate into Control Centre on Apple devices, gaining similar features using the Beats app on Android. It's all very slick. The Studio Pro are slightly more solid-feeling than their predecessors, and have new colours, but otherwise are almost identical looks-wise. It's a simple, fairly low-key design, now with improved ear cushions that make them a smidgen more comfortable than the outgoing model. The ear cups are shallow compared with some and clamp your head strongly to keep them in place while remaining light and comfortable for long three-hour-plus listening sessions. The left cup has a multifunction "b" button for playback controls, with a volume rocker surrounding it. The right cup has the battery gauge and a power button, which you double press to switch noise-cancelling modes. They do not automatically pause the music when taken off the head like many rivals. Specifications Weight: 260g Dimensions: 181 x 178 x 78mm Drivers: 40mm Connectivity: Bluetooth 5.3, 3.5mm, USB-C (charging and audio) Bluetooth codecs: SBC, AAC Battery life: 24 hours (ANC on) The inside of the headphones is all new. The Studio Pro use a proprietary Beats chip and support Apple's personalised spatial audio for Dolby Atmos surround sound in movies and music with "head tracking", so that the audio always appears to be anchored on the screen in front of you as you move about. On Android, you are limited to standard spatial audio without head tracking. Other than Bluetooth 5.3 with support for the SBC and AAC audio standards, the Studio Pro have a 3.5mm headphones and a USB-C port, the latter of which can be used for charging and audio. When playing via USB-C, the headphones support Hi-Res audio, including tracks from streaming services such as Amazon, Apple and Tidal. There is also a choice of sound profile, including an entertainment or conversation mode, but noise-cancelling is disabled when listening via USB-C. The headphones last for about 24 hours of playback with noise-cancelling, or up to 40 hours with it off, which is decent but miles behind the 60 hours that class leaders Sennheiser manage. They take two hours to fully charge, reaching enough for about four hours of playback in 10

minutes. Sustainability Apple does not provide an expected lifespan for the batteries but they should last in excess of 500 full-charge cycles with at least 80% of original capacity. Apple is due to offer a "battery service" for the headphones in a year's time, which is expected to cost about £95. It does not directly offer repair options or replacement parts, but third-party ear cushions and other bits are readily available. The headphones are made from recycled plastic, tin and rare earth elements but Apple does not publish environmental impact reports for accessories such as headphones. The company offers trade-in and free recycling schemes, including for non-Apple products. Good sound and noise-cancelling The Studio Pro are without doubt the best-sounding Beats headphones to date. The brand has been slowly improving its audio quality since its acquisition by Apple in 2014, but the Studio Pro are the first to really try to compete on a level with the best from Sony and Sennheiser. They can hit deep notes and have good treble and highs. They maintain the separation of tones even in the most complex tracks, and vocal clarity is top-notch. They are much better balanced overall than previous versions. They do require a bit of volume to sound at their best, but sound great for most genres. They lack a bit of dynamism compared with the Sennheiser Momentum 4, but overall the Studio Pro are a very enjoyable listen. The Beats also do movies justice with some great-sounding spatial audio with various Apple devices, which you can personalise by taking scans of your ears with an iPhone's TrueDepth camera. The headphones also have improved adaptive noise-cancelling over their predecessors, reaching a similar level to the AirPods Max. They effectively reduce most rumbles and unwanted sound but struggle with the tougher higher tones, allowing a little more background chatter through than the very best. They stop wind noise from getting really loud but can't block it out entirely. Their transparency mode, which allows ambient noise through the headphones, is excellent, sounding very natural and similar to the best-in-class AirPods Pro. Call quality is really good in quiet and loud environments, coming through clearly, with a relatively natural sound without noise breaking through to the other end of the call. Price The Beats Studio Pro cost £349.99 ($349.99). For comparison, the Beats Solo 3 Wireless cost £199.95, the Apple AirPods Max cost £549, the Sennheiser Momentum 4 cost £309.99, the Bose QC45 cost £319.95 and the Sony WH-1000XM5 cost £319. Verdict The Studio Pro are an evolution of the Beats headphones that started it all. They don't look all that different from the previous few versions, but inside they have seen some significant upgrades. The sound is really good, falling just shy of the very best from Sennheiser and Sony. The noise-cancelling is pretty good, too, again just shy of the top Bose and Sony models. But it is their deep integration with Apple's various devices and Android that sets them apart. No other brand can offer similar, which makes them ideal for those who use a combination of Android and Apple. Full support for spatial audio on Apple's devices is a particular bonus for movies, while the ability to use Bluetooth, 3.5mm or USB-C for sound is very welcome. The fact that there is no direct repair option from Apple is disappointing, and there's no doubt you are paying extra for the brand. Unlike most Apple devices, Beats can be found cheaper if you shop around, at least. The Studio Pro are the best-sounding Beats to date and offer a combination of Apple and Android features no one else can match. Pros: great sound and solid noise-cancelling, cross-platform compatibility with enhanced features for iPhone and Android, head-tracking spatial audio, can use USB-C or 3.5mm cable as well as Bluetooth, solid battery life, comfortable fit, good button controls, recycled materials. Cons: expensive, do not pause music on removal, no direct repair options, design hasn't significantly changed in years, no higher-quality Bluetooth audio format support.