

# Bose QC Ultra earbuds review: top-class noise cancelling with audio upgrade

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Bose's commuter favourite QuietComfort earbuds have been given an upgrade, setting the standard with best-in-class noise cancelling and new immersive audio features. Costing £300 (€350/\$300/A\$450) the QC Ultra earbuds are £20 more than the excellent QC Earbuds II they effectively replace, rubbing shoulders with the best in the business from Sennheiser, Sony and Apple. Unlike the revamped QC Ultra headphones, the earbuds have only been given a light touch on the outside with a few metallic accents here and there. Otherwise, they look like the Earbuds II: fairly large compared with competitors with flat stalks that point towards your mouth. The combination of silicone earbud tips and wings provide a comfortable and secure hold in your ear. Each bit comes in different sizes in the box so you can mix and match to get the right size for your ears, with a fit test available in the Bose Music app. Touch-sensitive controls take care of volume, playback, noise cancelling and sound modes, which work well. The battery life remains the same six hours of noise cancelling as the previous models, with three full charges in the case for up to 24 hours of playback, meaning they compete with some of their best rivals. Specifications Water resistance: sweat resistant (IPX4) Connectivity: Bluetooth 5.3 (SBC, AAC, aptX Adaptive) Battery life: 6 hours (up to 24 hours with case) Earbud dimensions: 17.2 x 30.5 x 22.4mm Earbud weight: 6.24g each Charging case dimensions: 59.4 x 66.3 x 26.7mm Charging case weight: 59.8g Case charging: USB-C Top-class noise cancelling with upgraded immersive audio The earbuds have some of the best noise cancelling you can get on any headphones, let alone something as small as a set of earbuds. They match the QC Earbuds II in their ability to dampen unwanted hums and roars as well as the higher tones of keyboard clicks and background chatter. The "awareness" mode is also very good, sounding fairly natural with an automatic loud-noise reduction system that stops you being deafened by the screech of train wheels and other piercing sounds. The earbuds have the same customisable modes as the Ultra headphones, so you create different combinations of noise-cancelling and sound modes to quickly switch between them. Call quality is excellent, and able to isolate your voice from background noise very well while sounding fairly natural on both ends of the call. The earbuds sound good, retaining Bose's clear and controlled audio processing, which adjusts the balance of the music depending on the volume, helping provide a full audio experience even when listening quietly. They are bass-heavy but have an equaliser in the Bose Music app to adjust things. With the new immersive or spatial audio mode, the sounds appears to come from speakers placed in a virtual space around you rather than piped straight into your ears. The "still" mode tracks the movement of your head so that it always sounds like the audio is coming from a point fixed ahead of you, adding to the realism. It does a good job of making movies and TV shows more immersive, and works with any brand of

phone, computer or tablet – unlike most systems. The earbuds are also one of the first Bose products to support Google's instant Bluetooth pairing and Qualcomm's higher quality aptX Adaptive audio format, in addition to the standard SBC and AAC formats, which are excellent enhancements for Android or Windows users. Otherwise they are standard Bluetooth 5.3 earbuds and easy to pair with a button on the case. Either earbud can be used on its own, which is handy for calls, but they can only connect to a single device at any one time. Sustainability Bose estimates that the batteries will last in excess of 500 full charge cycles but they are not replaceable and the earbuds are not currently repairable, ultimately making them disposable. Some replacement parts including ear tips (£15) and a charging case (£90) are available. The earbuds do not contain recycled materials. Bose offers discounts for returning broken products. It does not publish individual product environmental impact reports but does publish annual sustainability reports. Price The Bose QuietComfort Ultra Earbuds cost £299.95 (€349.95/\$299/A\$449.95). For comparison, QC Earbuds II cost £279.95, the Sony WF-1000XM5 cost £259, the Sennheiser Momentum True Wireless 3 cost £189, the Jabra Elite 10 cost £230, Google Pixel Buds Pro cost £199 and Apple AirPods Pro 2 cost £229. Verdict The Bose QuietComfort Ultra earbuds continue to set the standard for noise-cancelling earbuds, dampening the unwanted sounds of the outside world better than any other. They also sound good, have solid battery life, a stable and comfortable fit, and a good case that's only a little bit bigger than the best. The Ultra versions get a little more flashy with metallic accents. But the bigger upgrades are new Bluetooth capabilities for Android and immersive audio for all platforms, which makes TVs and movies sound a bit more real, even if it is a bit hit and miss for music. That seems worth an extra £20 the price of the already excellent Earbuds II if you're looking for a new set, but is certainly not worth upgrading for. You can get better-sounding earbuds, those with more features for specific platforms and ones that are smaller and more discreet. They are certainly pricey, so shop around, but for silencing the daily commute they are hard to beat. Despite having spare parts available, they can't be repaired and the battery can't be replaced, ultimately making them disposable, losing them a star. Pros: Best-in-class noise cancelling, good sound with immersive/spatial audio, solid battery life and case, customisable and comfortable fit, sweat resistance, good controls, great call quality, aptX Adaptive support for Android/Windows. Cons: very expensive, no multipoint connectivity, large and less discreet than the best, unrepairable by Bose.