

Lightspeed Zulu PFX

Lightspeed has taken the concept of premium aviation headsets one step further with the release of the Zulu PFX, a headset that adapts itself to the individual.

In days not so long gone a headset review would have talked about flex-booms and electret microphones, or raved on about gel-filled ears seals that reduced the pain of clamping force (marginally). Like air conditioning in a new car, many pilots wouldn't buy a product that didn't offer those features as standard; nowadays we are concerned more with what else we get for our money.

Take, if you will, the Lightspeed Zulu PFX. Lightspeed has taken the concept of active noise reduction (ANR)—fine-tuned in their Sierra and Zulu 2 products—one step further by adding technology that personalises the ANR to your very own acoustic landscape. They've given us something else we didn't know we wanted, and more value for our money.

Pitched at the same buyers who might be considering the Bose A20 or Sennheiser S1 Digital, the Zulu PFX is made of the same durable, yet lightweight materials that mark the difference between economy-grade and top-line aviation headsets. It also comes with the bluetooth and ANR technology that has become almost mandatory in any unit priced over about \$500. The difference is in the Personal Flight Experience – PFX.

But before all the added functions and modern-day linkability become important, any headset has to be comfortable and not subject the pilot's head to eye-crossing clamping force. The PFX scores highly on that scale, with a headband that is largely not noticeable to the wearer, cavernous ear cups that won't crush

your lobes and a low-impact fit that doesn't change your head shape.

That takes care of the basics. It is the enhanced features that have the PFX marked down as one of the most innovative aviation headsets on the market. According to Lightspeed, it is the quietest, thanks to proprietary software that maps the shape and size of your ear, then tailors the ANR function to suit both your personal landscape within the ear cup and the noise environment.

Known as Streaming Quiet, the software uses microphones placed within the ear cup to monitor and continuously update the ANR to account for changes in the inbound noise. According to Lightspeed, Streaming Quiet checks the sound patterns and relays information to the headset computer processing unit (CPU) one million times per second, enabling the headset to make finite adjustments to the ANR ... so finite you'll never notice it.

Everything is controlled from the CPU that is connected in-line with the leads. Sliding volume controls mounted in the CPU face are easy to use, but they would be better if they were larger or protruded more from the face; sometimes we need a bit of help when cockpits get a bit bouncy.

And it is the CPU itself embodies the one big negative of the Zulu PFX, compared to the A20 or the S1, it's huge and bulky. This can be an issue when you want to stow it in flight. Lightspeed has included a large clip on the back, which would be handy for securing the CPU on a map pocket in a Piper or Cessna, but many aircraft either don't have those pockets



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or the elastic is so shot it couldn't support an empty matchbox. Consequently, you will have to experiment a bit to find a way to keep the PFX CPU secured.

However, the with the PFX the traditional battle to make the headset cords trail somewhere the hell out of your way is over. The cords on the Lightspeed are made of silver-coated copper alloy wrapped around Kevlar, which makes them durable and amazingly flexible. They hang like rope without any of the stiffness that causes the old leads to have a mind of their own.

Zulu PFX can be further personalised by connecting via Bluetooth to the Lightspeed Flightlink iPad app, which stores and enables you to make changes to the way the headset functions. You can adjust the bass and treble, boost voice clarity and set intercom priorities, as well as recording all incoming and outgoing transmissions. For example, imagine being able to

playback that last ATC call to double-check your clearance.

The Bluetooth capability brings to the table the ability to hook into mobile phones and music machines, so you can check weather and make calls without having to stick your iPhone under the ear cup, or just listen to tracks on the long cruise over the Nullarbor. The danger of you missing something important over the radio is reduced with the ComPriority function, which automatically lowers the volume of any auxiliary device when a radio or intercom message is detected.

There's a lot packed into the Lightspeed Zulu PFX, but that's what we've come to expect from the high-end of the headset range. It will probably be a few years away before we start demanding some of these features as standard fare in our headsets, and for now they are certainly the leading edge of technology.
RRP: \$US1100
www.lightspeedaviation.com