

TOP GEAR | PRODUCT REVIEWS

A ROUND-UP OF THE LATEST AVIATION KIT WHERE WE IMPARTIALLY TEST AND EVALUATE EVERY PRODUCT FEATURED

**Lightspeed Aviation
Zulu PFX**£844
www.transair.co.uk

OK, I'll say it. The Zulu PFX is probably the best ANR headset ever made. There, I've done it. No, wait, I've got to tell you it comes at a price. Not a monetary one, although at £844 it is one of the more pricey ANR headsets. No, the cost is that to get the best out of it, you have to be patient. More than that, you need to be a bit of a geek.

Out of the box, you'll be impressed by the appearance and feel of the PFX. It's a light 400g. Then you'll notice the absolute whopper that is the Central Processing Unit (CPU), the box that's the hub for most of the electronic wizardry and all of the switches and controls. Lightspeed says some functions were moved from the headset to the CPU to help keep weight out of the headset, so I'll forgive it some of its bulk.

On your head it feels light and there's a high level of comfort. Annoyingly, the mic boom can only be used on the left side of your head, so

there'll be some instances where annoying cable routing can't be avoided.

You'll want to spend time getting the PFX perfectly located on your head, ensuring that your ears are fully inside the seals. Turn it on and you're treated to an average ANR reduction in noise. Go one step further and push the 'Action' key, and you'll hear test tones that map the acoustic landscape of your ears. Sounds like nonsense, and initially you'll think it is. But like I said, the PFX is all about patience. Given time, the quality of noise-cancelling just keeps getting better.

Intercom voice and radio transmissions have really astonishing clarity, while music via Bluetooth (connection is zero fuss) or the audio lead is excellent – the auto-mute reduces the volume to a very low level during r/t chatter, which makes for a very enjoyable listening experience. Settings, and there are quite a few, are controlled via Bluetooth connection to the FlightLink app. If you use the capability to make a phonecall in flight, then don't be surprised if the person you call doesn't believe you're flying, there's just no noise evident to them!

The longer you wear the PFX, the quieter it seems to get. On one flight of over an hour, it got to the point where any low frequency noise from the engine had been all but cancelled. Just don't tap the headset on bits of hard cabin structure – mine would emit a brain-startling tone on the occasion I caught the right ear cup on glazing. Oddly though, doing the same to the left side wasn't a problem. Occasionally, I would hear an odd electronic pop, almost as if it was trying to show me just how hard it was working to maintain my new quiet world.

Open windows seemed to unsettle the ANR, although sliding the mode switch from 'Favourites' to 'Home' always provided a more stable response. Sure enough, the manual advises you to use that setting 'in extremely loud aircraft, operating in high rpm phases of flight'. Understood, but aren't you buying this to help you out in extremely loud situations? The changeover also serves to demonstrate the extra level of quietness the 'Streaming Quiet' technology adds – it's like having a second 'super' ANR switch.

The ear seals are the best I've used when it comes to dealing with glasses, with no noise

CPU control box is big and heavy, but that shouldn't put you off!





The FlightLink app allows for a full range of function and sound adjustment



The adjustable headband is nicely crafted, although the rubberised finish of some components is a bit prone to scuffing

leaking in. Very visible arm impressions left in the material after the headset was removed showed that they were really doing their job. The seals are lifed however – like those on the AKG AV100 we tested in the June issue of **FLYER** – and Lightspeed recommends changing them, as well as the mic windscreen, every 18 months to maintain peak performance.

As for battery life, initially I burned my way through two sets of batteries, before discovering the auto shut-off as set by the factory didn't work. In fact, it took a bit of testing to discover that only the 10min setting would trigger the function. Luckily, Lightspeed promises me this can be fixed with a firmware update.

If you're the sort of pilot who throws a headset on their head, switches it on, then expects it to do its job while flying something like a 450hp Stearman, then you should probably buy one of the other premium brands. But if you're a patient, kit-loving geek who enjoys tweaking settings while flying a Cirrus, then the Zulu PFX is for you.

Ed Hicks



Buttons, sliders and switches – it pays to make yourself familiar with which ones do what



All the connections are robust, while Kevlar-core cable has an unusual stranded appearance