

Electronics

- [Beats Studio Buds](#)
- [Boltune Wireless Earbuds 030](#)
- [System76 Darter Pro \(darp5\)](#)
- [Keychron C1 & C2](#)
- [TicWatch GTH](#)

Beats Studio Buds

About

The Beats Studio Buds are water resistant wireless earbuds with active noise cancellation and a long battery life.

Purchase Date: 2022-12-25

Review Date: 2022-12-31



Review

The Beats Studio Buds are a middle tier earbud with good sound quality. Their small in-ear form factor, sound quality, and battery life are all standout features, however they also lack some features that have come to be expected in premium earbuds.

Key features:

- Active noise control
- Long battery life for earbuds and case
- Quick recharge of earbuds in case
- Multiple mics on each earbud

Missing features:

- Proximity sensor for auto play/pause

The Good

The Beats Studio Buds have great build quality, a sturdy case, pretty good sound (for wireless earbuds), and great battery life.

The battery life here really is top notch, and even if you do use the earbuds so long that they run out of juice, they will quick-charge in the case. Put them in the case for just a minute or two and you'll get over an hour more listening time.

The earbuds and case have a great premium feel to them, this is important for earbuds as they are prone to breaking quite easily.

I find these fit very well in the ears, stay in better than I expected, and are easier to put in than I expected. You may need to spend a minute getting used to their shape and how to insert them. Despite their tiny size, they are easy to take out of the case and put back in without dropping them.

The Okay

The Active Noise Cancelling (ANC) and Passthrough modes are okay at best. I don't think they have included enough microphones on this device to provide higher quality ANC or passthrough unfortunately.

It is difficult to tell which sound mode you are in, especially since ANC and passthrough aren't very exceptional. Exacerbating this is the use of sound effects telling you which mode you are in when you switch. I will never learn which sound means which, and find myself switching though them multiple times and clapping or tapping to try and tell which one I am in. I prefer earbuds that say which mode they are in when you switch, For example speaking out the words, "ANC" or "Ambient".

The buttons on these earbuds are physical. I'm normally all for physical buttons, but on earbuds, touch controls are much better. These are some of the best physical buttons I've tried on earbuds, so they aren't a major downside, but you are a little limited on the number of things you can control because of them. The plus side however is you'll never get accidental presses or wonder if you're pressing in the correct spot.

The Bad

While one-touch pairing is supposed to do away with all your bluetooth pairing troubles, I actually had a worse experience pairing these to my Android phone than I have ever had with any bluetooth

device in over a decade. The setup workflow is unclear as it tries to pair and install an app at the same time, leaving you on a screen with incorrect instructions. After my first time pairing, the earbuds would not reconnect to my phone, so I had to reset them and start from scratch. The second time I got errors with no way to resolve them. Eventually after a phone reboot and earbud reset everything paired fine. It was an incredibly frustrating experience and their app provides zero advice if everything doesn't go exactly as they have planned.

At this price-point it is unacceptable to not have proximity sensors.

It is not possible to control both ANC and volume at the same time. By default, you cannot control the volume level. I find it unbelievable that any company makes wireless earbuds that don't let you adjust the volume. Volume control is core functionality, full stop. Having said that, the poor passthrough does mean you could just give up that functionality and switch the headphones to volume control. Even with the change, volume control is still poorly implemented.

The case is very large despite these being very small earbuds. I'm not sure why they designed such a large case compared to other earbuds on the market. I want to keep earbuds in my pocket all the time, and these take up way too much pocket space. If you keep them elsewhere, this likely isn't as big of a deal for you.

Decision

While the Beats Studio Buds have a quality build and decent sound, the feature-set for the price-point is not quite there. Never pay full price for these. Even on sale there are competing products with good sound that include more features.

Your pairing experience may differ, and I hope it does, but one-touch pairing did not live up to the promise for me. And when it fails, you'll wish for your old pair of earbuds that at least would pair, even if it took 1 minute the first time.

I am using and enjoying my pair since they were a gift, but even receiving them for free I still dearly miss a proximity sensor for auto play-pause.

The Rest

My Purchase Price (including tax and shipping): This was a gift. Standard retail price is \$149.99. Can often be found on sale for \$99.95

Main Website: [Beats](#)

Boltune Wireless Earbuds 030

About

The Boltune 030 are water resistant wireless earbuds with active noise cancellation and in-ear detection.

Purchase Date: 2021-09-10

Review Date: 2022-01-25



Review

The Boltune 030 are budget earbuds first and foremost. They drew my attention because they punched above their weight in features and promised audio quality. There are many different models that come out on a regular basis, so this review may function well as a general review of Boltune earbud quality.

Key features:

- Proximity sensor for auto play/pause
- Active noise control
- Long battery life for earbuds and case
- Multiple mics on each earbud

The Good

These earbuds are significantly better quality than their price may suggest. The audio quality is on par with \$50+ earbuds, with healthy levels across the spectrum.

These earbuds are both comfortable to wear and use. The touch sensitive pads on each bud are easy to find and press with a light touch. The controls are easy to learn and I rarely found myself making mistakes after the first week of use.

Active noise control is a great feature, and it works very well here. You can turn it off if desired while listening to music/etc, or set it to passthrough to pause your audio and hear the outside world almost as clearly as if you didn't have earbuds in.

The batteries in the earbuds themselves last a long time, and the case will charge them up several times over before needing a recharge itself. I never found myself wishing the battery lasted longer. The case is compact, feels nice, uses USB-C, and fits easily anywhere.

The earbuds connect fairly fast since they start connecting as soon as you open the case lid. They are also reliable in their connection, and I have never needed to re-pair them to fix any issues. Taking one out of your ear causes them to auto-pause your music, and putting them back in resumes it.

The Okay

Build quality and longevity are where Boltune saved some money on these earbuds. They feel good enough quality to the touch, but with my first pair the touch controls broke out of the blue, and my second pair sometimes act up as well. Boltune did replace my first pair after having my run through some basic checks. But they also forgot to ship the replacement from their warehouse and after a month I had to reach out asking for a tracking update. They quickly shipped my replacement after that.

The Bad

I find the earbuds difficult to remove from the case. The shape of the exposed portion of the earbuds make them slippery and easy to drop when you are removing them. I would say be careful, but even still you are bound to drop them. This is bound to shorten their lifespan when coupled with their mid-range build quality.

In some instances one of the buds would not fully settle into place causing it not to charge. At least a few times one of the buds died on my because it had not charged, despite being in a charged case for hours beforehand.

The earbuds constantly disconnect and reconnect whenever I use them for phone calls. It appears that using the speakers and mic at the same time cause the connection to drop. The earbuds do automatically reconnect fairly quickly, but you can miss a lot of important things when audio cuts

out for 5 seconds every few minutes. I do not know if this happens when connected to all devices, or it is an issue with my phone specifically. As it is now, they are not suitable for phone calls for me. Thankfully I only use them for music and podcasts 99% (invisible) of the time.

Decision

When on sale for under \$50, these are a worthwhile pair of wireless earbuds. They sound good and are feature packed.

The trade-off you are making with a cheaper pair of Boltune earbuds like this is reliability. You may occasionally run into audio, connection, or even hardware issues. I would not expect these to reliably work for more than 2 years.

With the exception of the connection dropping on calls (Which may be a deal breaker for many), I have not had any major frustrations with these earbuds, and I often hear similar or worse frustrations from people using expensive name-brand wireless earbuds.

The Rest

My Purchase Price (including tax and shipping): **\$39.75**

Usually on Sale at [TaoTronics](#)

Usually full price at Boltune: <https://www.boltune.com/products/bt-bh030-wireless-earbuds-030-bluetooth>

Image not found or type unknown



System76 Darter Pro (darp5)

About

The Darter Pro is a 15" linux-first ultrabook made by System76.

Purchase Date: 2019-04-01

Review Date: 2022-01-20



Review

Let's start with the elephant in the room. Yes, I know that System76 doesn't design their own laptop chassis, but I also know that they release custom firmware and work with Clevo and others on the designs and configurations so this is not just an off-the-shelf laptop you can buy from anyone else. I do however look forward to the day when they can design and produce their own chassis.

Specs

If you want a full spec list, check out their website linked below. These are my thoughts on some specific specs that are worth noting.

The matte screen is between average to good quality and supports 1920×1080 FHD. While higher resolution would be nice these days, for this specific laptop I think the battery life would suffer too much with a higher resolution display. The display gets decently bright for indoor use, but is a bit dim for outdoor use.

The Darter Pro only supports Intel integrated graphics. System76 makes other laptops with Nvidia cards, so if you're looking for gaming or rendering check out their other offerings instead.

The battery life is sub-par. Check out the Battery section below for more details. Maybe their newer models are better?

Lots of ports, we love lots of ports on a laptop. Yes a Thunderbolt dock is amazing, but it's no replacement for ports.

Build Quality

I'm pleasantly surprised by the build quality of this laptop for only being partially metal. The top portions are a nice brushed metal look and feel, the hinge has held up better than almost any other laptop I've purchased from any major manufacturer ever, and the keyboard feels sturdy and solid.

My dislikes with the build are:

- They keys are a bit mushy feeling, despite also feeling well made.
- There's a lot of plastic on the bottom and around the screen
- The mouse buttons are pretty poor. They are very wide buttons and don't click consistently across their entire length

This is really a pretty short dislike list. My 2019 model only has a single USB-C 3.1 port, but I believe their newer models have two USB-C 3.2 ports. So while I'm sad with my single port, you won't be.

I also have firsthand experience that System76 stands behind their hardware. Over a year into ownership a screw came loose on the bottom and fell out before I got around to tightening it. The screw was near the hinge and I could see the slight flexing would eventually cause hinge damage. I reached out to System76 and they had replacement screws in the mail to me at no cost that same week. No, the screws shouldn't have come loose, and yes sending replacements is not much to

write home about, but since I had owned it for over a year, I'm not sure I would have been treated as well by many major laptop manufacturers.

Software

All of System 76's Laptops come with either their own Pop!_OS or Ubuntu preinstalled. Pop!_OS is a great, user-friendly, and stable OS that builds on what Ubuntu has done. I highly recommend you try out their distro if you get their laptop. You can always switch later if you prefer something else.

System76 has done a great job of improving hardware support over the old driver hunting days, plus has done a great job of providing native and open source firmware and other improvements you don't get when installing a distro on hardware that wasn't designed for it.

This isn't a review of Pop!_OS, but I do think it's a great distro with an exciting future.

Battery

Battery is the main drawback as I have never received good battery life with this laptop. My wife purchased an Lenovo laptop not long after I purchased the Dartar Pro and her laptop's battery life blows me away. I wish I could get more than a few hours before I am critically low, even with power saving options enabled. Obviously batteries degrade over the years, but even to start it wasn't amazing. Before purchasing a new Dartar Pro I would look around to see what people are getting for real-world battery life to see if it comes anywhere near the 9 hours they claim on their new model.

Support

I already talked a bit about their hardware support when I lost a screw, and maybe that wasn't worth mentioning. What is worth mentioning is that they provide software support as well. I reached out to their support one other time when I was having audio issues. Their support was quick to respond, collect logs from me, and begin troubleshooting what seemed like an OS issue. A quick fix later and I was good to go.

Decision

Since 2019 System76 has revamped the Dartar Pro with a new chassis that has better ports and a better screen design. I cannot speak to the new design's build quality since their site is sparse on build details, but if it matches the quality of the 2019 model then it's still a solid machine.

The Dartar Pro is light and portable, but has a large enough screen to be really productive on it. It's perfect for work and development as long as you don't have very high graphics needs that will tax the integrated graphics.

The Rest

My Purchase Price (including tax and shipping): **\$1,995.60**

View the official Darter Pro site: <https://system76.com/laptops/darter>

Keychron C1 & C2

About

The Keychron C1 and Keychron C2 are entry level wired mechanical keyboards. The C2 is a full-sized layout which includes a number pad, while the C1 forgoes the numpad for a more compact footprint.

Purchase Date: 2021-12-21

Review Date: 2022-01-18



Review

I personally used the Keychron C2 with the brown switch (shown above). For those newer to mechanical keyboards (as I am myself), a quick overview of the switch types:

- **Red:** Light weight, smooth/linear, and more quiet. Popular for gaming.
- **Brown:** Tactile feed. More noise than red
- **Blue:** Tactile and Clicky. Noisier, but best feedback on button press.

This mechanical keyboard is well built and sturdy. There are ABS plastic keycaps (not ideal, but perfectly fine for the price-point) included for both Windows and Mac layouts. The included USB cable is high quality, braided, and USB-C on both ends!

Pay close attention when purchasing this keyboard as it comes with 3 switch options (listed above), various backlight options, as well as Hot-Swappable or non swappable keys. I would of course

recommend hot-swappable keys, but if you're looking to save money and don't ever want to change your key-caps, then you can skip it. Do note that the ABS keycaps it comes with will fade off well before the rest of the keyboard goes bad though.

As my personal intro to mechanical keyboards, I have no complaints about the design or layout, with one exception. I do not like how the top row, which contains the Function key as well as Media Keys, defaults to the Media Keys and only acts as F keys when the FN key is also pressed. The FN key is only on one side and I personally want to use F12 much more often than Volume up. I still have not adjusted to this, and it may just be me who prefers things this way.

Overall, I think for a Windows or Mac user you could not ask for a better keyboard for the price.

I however am a Linux user, and this keyboard does suffer some functionality issues under Linux. I was pretty shocked to find this out after purchasing, because the last time I had compatibility issues with a keyboard was... never. Someone will inform me I'm sure, but I cannot fathom the reason this keyboard would not work well in Linux out of the box, other than that Keychron must be trying to be a little too fancy behind the scenes.

Keychron pretends to solve this issue by pointing you to a generic Facebook group every chance they have. This is an extremely poor user experience.

Decision

If you are looking for an entry level mechanical keyboard, or you aren't really sure what a mechanical keyboard is but know you need a better quality keyboard, I recommend the Keychron C1 or C2 to Windows and Mac users.

For Linux users, while there are workarounds to get things working as you'd expect them to work, I cannot recommend this keyboard. While yes, Linux users generally have the knowledge to enable these workarounds, I would recommend supporting a company that also supports your platform. Keychron as a company does not support the Linux community.

The Rest

My Purchase Price (including tax and shipping): **\$54.49**

View the official Keychron 2 site: <https://www.keychron.com/products/keychron-c2-wired-mechanical-keyboard>

TicWatch GTH

About

The TicWatch GTH is a health-centric budget smartwatch packed with sensors and running a custom OS (not Wear OS).

Purchase Date: 2021-08-10

Review Date: 2022-01-17



Review

The TicWatch GTH jumped out at me because of the large number of health features it packs in. The only other real smartwatch features it supports are notifications from your phone, and changeable watchfaces. You won't be installing any custom apps here, so expect a basic Fitbit rather than an Apple Watch.

Health Features

Skin temperature, blood oxygen level, heart rate, respiration rate, sleep tracking, step counter, workout detection (maybe more!). The sensors are where the GTH shines. I cannot speak to the accuracy of the sensors, but they record data at a frequent rate, and don't drain the battery. This is the reason you would buy this watch and it does deliver in this department. Through the companion app you can sync this data to a number of health services including both Google and Apple health.

The watch also has a moderate amount of built in exercise types you can choose from and while the watch does not support GPS, you can start a GPS track from the companion app on your phone if you will be bringing that along on your run/ride. While the number of exercise types supported is less than a Fitbit, my wife actually prefers how the GTH handles exercise tracking to that of the

[Fitbit Inspire](#).

Smart Watch Features

You can pick from a small set of predefined watch-faces. The selection is decent and changes with the season.

You can see notifications from your phone, but not respond to them. The font used by the watch is an atrocious monospaced font that doesn't allow much text to fit on the screen. It's difficult to overstate how much the font detracts from the rest of the watch. This is one of the main areas that I wish Mobvoi would push out an update for. There's no reason for the font to be as bad as it is.

That's about it smartwatch-wise. There are a few built in apps for things like the weather, but don't buy this watch if you're looking for a full-featured smartwatch. It's much closer to a Fitbit Tracker in terms of smartwatch features.

Battery Life

Expect several days of battery life, potentially up to a week. There is a battery-saver feature, but it limits the functionality of the watch so much that I find it not very useful. Unfortunately I do not believe you can prevent it from turning on automatically when the battery gets low.

Look and Feel

The screen is 360 x 320px, which does let you see the pixels, but is still crisper than many other watches, especially in this price range. The screen can also be a bit dim in the sunlight and there is a pretty thick bezel around the edges. However in this price range these are definitely acceptable trade-offs.

The overall watch design looks good and well-made, but it only comes in one color, so I hope you wanted it in black. Picking up a decent 3rd party watch band will really improve the look beyond the basic black rubberized one it comes with.

Connectivity and Companion App

This is where the TicWatch GTH falls flat. The Mobvoi companion app is worse than the terrible font the watch uses. The watch does not stay connected to the phone app for very long meaning your health data will stop syncing. You won't get any notice that the connection isn't working either. Using either the phone or the app to attempt to reconnect is a fool's errand as they provide no help or insight into how you might resolve the issue. The most recent time this happened to me I had to factory reset the watch AND uninstall/reinstall the phone app before it would re-pair. This is a deal-breaker for this watch unfortunately.

There have been no software updates released by Mobvoi since purchasing this watch.

Decision

Despite delivering a great package with all the health sensors you would want, the lack of care that Mobvoi has put into resolving the issues there are is a deal-breaker here. As a standalone health watch, the GTH is a great device, especially for the money, but the utter failure of Mobvoi to improve notifications or fix basic syncing functionality shows that the company has moved on from this device, and you probably should too.

If Mobvoi pushed out an update improving the notification font and fixing the connectivity issues I would heartily recommend this watch to those primarily looking for health features in their watch.

The Rest

My Purchase Price (including tax and shipping): **\$55.99**

View the official Ticwatch GTH site: <https://www.mobvoi.com/us/pages/ticwatchgth>

image not found or type unknown

