

SOUNDBITES – PHILIPS GOGEAR MP3 PLAYER

Neville Roberts



Philips GoGear SA2820 MP3 Player £30

Philips MP3 players have tended to be somewhat feature-light when compared with the competition in the same price bracket, so I was interested to see what the latest models had to offer.

For £30 or so, you can get an iPod Shuffle, but the SA2820 has twice the storage capacity at 2Gb. Like the iPod, they come complete with a set of in-ear earphones, a USB connecting lead and a CD containing the instruction manual and a piece of software which they call the Philips Device Manager.

Although the instructions insist that you load the software before connecting the device for the first time, the software is essentially a firmware upgrade manager and it checks the internet to see if any upgrades for the GoGear are available. Firmware is the software program on the GoGear that makes it work as a music player. The GoGear will work perfectly well without the Device Manager installed on your PC as it appears as another drive on your computer and you load music by simply dragging and dropping files and folders in the usual way. Having said that, I did temporarily load the Device Manager on my PC as there was a firmware upgrade available – the device was supplied with v2 of the firmware and I was able to upgrade it to v4.01.

The GoGear only supports a basic set of file formats - only MP3, WAV and unprotected WMA. Your subscriptions or purchases from the likes of Napster will not play on this player. It also does not have a built-in radio, but it does include the ability to make voice recordings via the built-in microphone and store them as WAV files on the device. This is actually a very handy facility to make notes while you are on the move and away from your reassuring stack of Post-It notes! The sound quality of these voice recording is surprisingly good – very clear regardless of where you position the device – you don't need to talk directly into the microphone hole on the case!

The GoGear has a tiny dot matrix OLED screen which is extremely clear, bright and easy to read. Each edge of the square-shaped face acts as a navigational button and this is supplemented with 2 buttons on the top edge to Play/Pause and Return, a Volume +/- rocker on the right edge, a Voice Record on the left edge above the USB socket and the all-important button lock (or disable) switch at the bottom. All-in-all, a very easy-to-use device with intuitive menus.

So how does it sound? Well, I first tried it with the supplied Philips earpieces – they are not really up to the job as their frequency response is more peaky than the surface of a lemon-meringue pie! I then (unfairly) plugged in a pair of Sennheiser HD580 headphones and whacked up the volume to see what the little 3mW amp would do. In fact, it didn't sound bad at all, but understandably not much volume. I then tried them with a pair of Sennheiser OMX 90 VC clip-on earphones (which incidentally cost more than the GoGear!). These sounded very good indeed – a well balanced sound with a range of music from classical to pop. The only criticism is that they are still a bit quiet and could do with some more drive – the 'Volume Limit' feature of the GoGear 'to protect your hearing' is a bit redundant!

The GoGear includes an equalizer for "optimised sound to suit your music style". Several presets are provided: Off, Full Sound, Rock, Funk, Jazz, Classical, Hip Hop, Techno and Custom. In common with many other equalizers, they offer the user a variety of different ways to mess up the sound and the best setting is therefore the first one!

To summarise, the sound quality can be very good if the GoGear is partnered with some decent earphones. It's not going to provide enough volume to compete with a noisy environment, but what it does offer is an easy-to-use device that is great value for money and is ideal for the purpose of being a tiny MP3 player for providing music on-the-move.

Contact Philips on +44 (0) 1293 776675 or visit their website at <http://www.consumer.philips.com>



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