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Tech > Mobile

Oakley Thump review: Oakley Thump

The future's so loud, you gotta wear shades.



Rick Broida

Nov. 3, 2004 5:28 a.m. PT

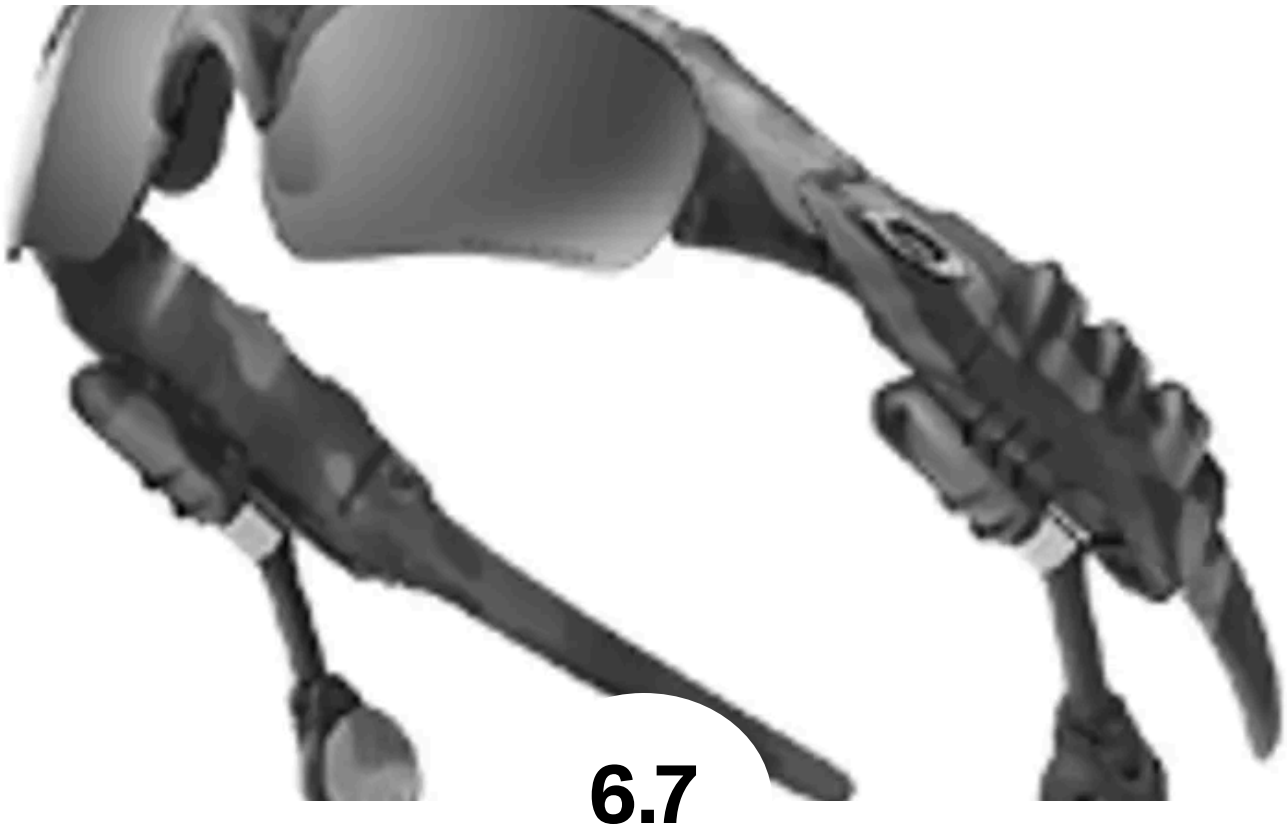
3 min read

Oakley Thump

We've seen audio players built into headphones and we've seen audio players built into pendants. The Oakley Thump is the first audio player we've seen that's built into sunglasses--and we hope it's not the last. Though it's priced like a high-end iPod and designed more for function than fashion, we can't help loving these shades, which feature UV protection and impact resistance. You will, too, especially if you enjoy spending time outdoors.

The very idea behind the Thump's design is ingenious, but the execution is mixed. For starters, we were pleased to find that we could wear them over regular eyeglasses, though obviously it felt a little weird. With or without glasses, the Thump fits snugly enough that you can exercise without fear of them bouncing around or flying off your head. Plus, there isn't a cord to get in the way.

IPR2024-01071
E-Vision Optics, LLC EX-2017



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Oakley Thump

THE GOOD

Great sound; excellent earpiece design; USB 2.0; plays DRM-protected WMAs; rechargeable battery; they're sunglasses!

THE BAD

Stiff and awkward controls; shockingly expensive; cheap plastic feel; so-so battery life.

THE BOTTOM LINE

If you can afford it, the Thump is just about the coolest thing you can put over your eyes and ears.

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The earbuds are highly adjustable and are able to raise, rotate, and extend to fit just about any set of ears. Although they're not padded, we found them to be much more comfortable than most earbuds because they don't have to be mashed into your ears to stay put. We also liked the flip-up lenses, which make the Thump more suitable for indoor use (and make the wearer look even sillier).

On the other hand, the Thump's frame has a decidedly plastic feel to it--a concession, no doubt, to the need to make them as light as possible (and at 1.8 ounces, they're reasonably light), but still a disappointment given the high price tag. Thankfully, Oakley offers colors other than the boring matte black, including Rootbeer, Tortoise, and White Camo. Color choices vary depending on whether you choose the 128MB or 256MB model; the latter has the bonus of polarized lenses.

Our bigger complaint was with the controls: two buttons on the left arm and three buttons on the right, all annoyingly stiff. Actually operating the player is easy enough--the left buttons control the volume; the right ones, play/pause/power and skip/shuttle--but it takes way too much effort to change the volume just a few notches. Our loaner Thump was an "engineering sample;" here's hoping Oakley solves this problem during final production.

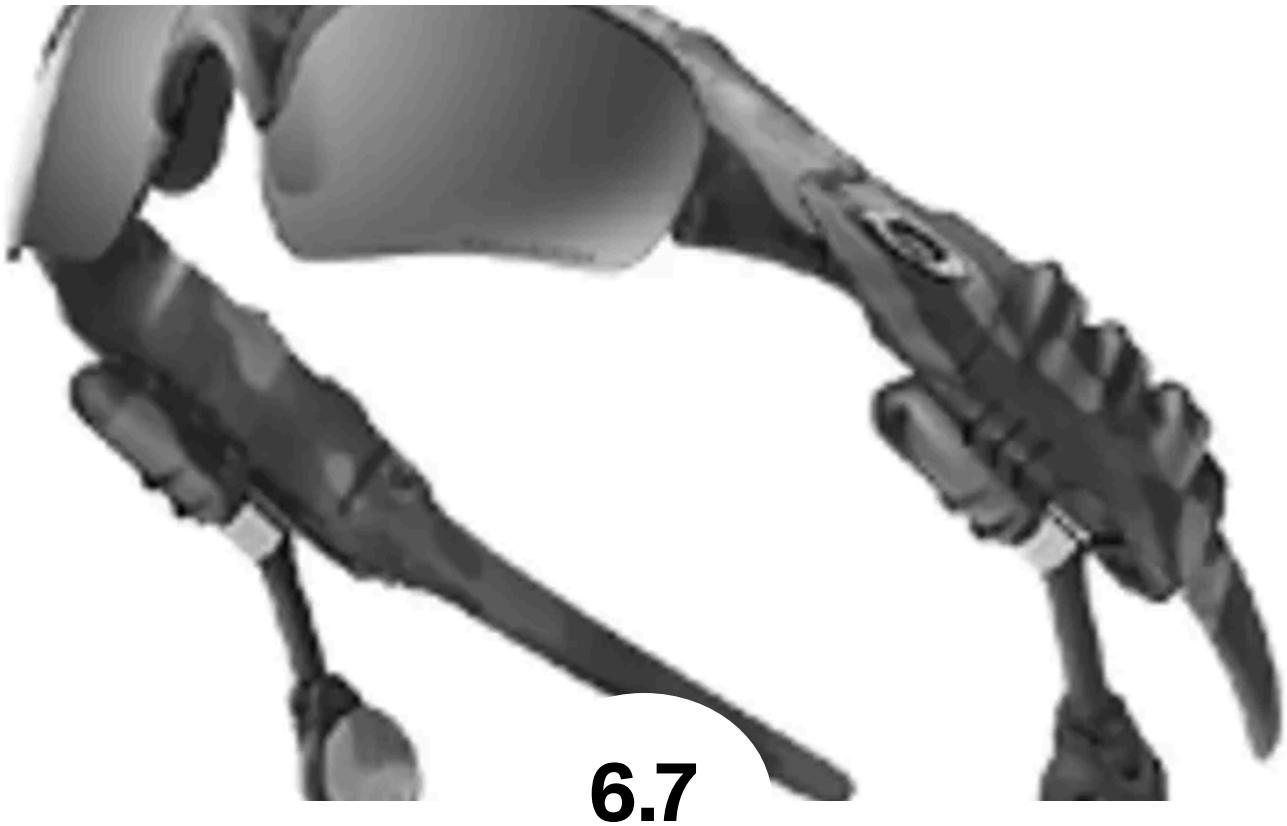
Not surprisingly, these bare-bones controls translate to bare-bones playback options. There's an easily accessible random-play mode; otherwise, songs are played in the order they were copied to the player or alphabetically, if copied all at once. You can also cycle through a handful of preprogrammed equalizer settings, though Oakley doesn't specify what they are--and without an LCD, there's no way to visually tell what mode you're in.

Adding music to the Thump is exclusively a drag-and-drop affair unless you use a program like Musicmatch or Windows Media Player, though no such software is included. Thankfully, the Thump features a USB 2.0 interface, so copying songs is a speedy process. CNET Labs recorded an average transfer time of 1.3MB per second when moving 100MB of MP3s. In addition to that

popular format, the Thump supports WAV and DRM-protected WMAs, so you can play songs purchased from most online stores, though you have to download a firmware update first. It can also be used to store data files.

The Thump features a nonremovable lithium-ion battery that recharges via the USB. There's no repeat function, so we were unable to record a solid time for battery life. Oakley says the battery is good for about 6 hours between charges--not great, but at least you don't have to buy disposables.

For most prospective buyers, the only real stumbling block is the price: $395 and $495 for the 128MB and 256MB models, respectively. With a 40GB Apple iPod selling for about the same price as the 128MB Thump, it's hard to justify splurging on the shades. For what it's worth, the Thump delivers phenomenal sound. Even our 128Kbps MP3s demonstrated a surprisingly full-bodied clarity. But Oakley needs to lower the price so that even nonmillionaires can enjoy this way-cool eyewear.



6.7

Oakley Thump

SCORE BREAKDOWN

Design	6
Features	7
Performance	7

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