JBL Tour Pro 2 review: these earbuds have a screen

Am I holding the future of wireless earbuds in my hands? Or are JBL's Tour Pro 2 buds — with a charging case that has its own built-in display — a parlor trick negated by the smartwatch? Do you need these controls directly on the physical product when they're all easily accessible via an app on your phone? I've been testing the new $249.95 noise-canceling earbuds for a couple weeks now, and strangely enough, it's a difficult question to answer.

The Tour Pro 2 are the first to come to market with an interactive case; HP has announced something similar (albeit focused on enterprise customers), and Apple patent filings suggest that the AirPods maker is at least *exploring* this concept. But JBL's earbuds are here now and start shipping today in the US after launching in other markets earlier this year.

7Verge Score

JBL Tour Pro 2

$ 249.95

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The Bad

- Everything you do with the case can be done elsewhere
- Transparency / passthrough mode sounds bad
- Yet another screen in your life

How we rate and review products
Look, I know we're all in this together for the zany case-with-a-screen experiment. So let's get the earbuds part of this equation out of the way first. The Tour Pro 2 include an exhaustive, well-rounded list of features. Their adaptive noise-cancellation, which adjusts in real time based on the loudness of your environment, is impressively strong and comparable to the upper tier of competition. Battery life is another highlight and rated at up to eight hours of continuous listening with ANC on or 10 with it off — plus another 24 or 30 hours from the case, respectively. That outlasts the AirPods Pro, Samsung's Galaxy Buds 2 Pro, the Nothing Ear 2, and other premium options.

According to JBL, the sound signature from these 10-millimeter drivers follows the revered Harman response curve, albeit with some extra bass tacked on. And while the Tour Pro 2 sound perfectly good, I still prefer the audio fidelity from the second-gen AirPods Pro, Samsung's flagship buds, and Sennheiser's Momentum True Wireless 3 earbuds. To my ears, those earbuds have more depth, greater dynamic range, and just lend more definition to whatever music is playing. The Tour Pro 2 don't fully sound like $250 earbuds to me, so yeah, the case is factoring into that price. You get several equalizer settings to pick between, and JBL's Personi-Fi feature can further tune the audio output frequencies based on your own hearing traits and preferences.

The company also piles on other tricks like multipoint, proprietary spatial audio profiles (music, movie, games, etc.), an earbuds locator utility, and speech detection for automatically activating ambient sound mode. That transparency

/ ambient sound mode was where I was least impressed; it just sounds very stuffy, inarticulate, and lags modern competitors quite substantially. Voice call performance is clear and satisfactory, however, and the earbuds are rated IPX5 for water and sweat resistance.

To sum it all up, the Tour Pro 2 are comfortable, sound good even if not great, and they pack plenty of battery endurance. JBL also notes that the earbuds are ready for LE Audio spec and will be updated to enable it once the spec goes mainstream. That could lead to more efficiency and even better battery performance. For now, Bluetooth codec support is limited to AAC and SBC.

a:hover]:text-black [&>a:hover]:shadow-underline-black dark:[&>a:hover]:text-gray-e9 dark:[&>a:hover]:shadow-underline-gray-63 [&>a]:shadow-underline-gray-13 dark:[&>a]:shadow-underline-gray-63″>*It’s never been easier to find the buds you’ve misplaced somewhere nearby.*

That’s a lot of widgets to constantly be swiping between. You can (and should) remove the ones you don’t want through JBL’s mobile app for Android or iOS and cut that list down to a more manageable five or six screens.

Track controls and volume adjustments work well enough, although you’re never shown what song is currently playing; it’s just the controls. (You can’t fast forward or rewind by long-pressing the buttons, either.) Other core tasks like switching audio modes or EQ modes also pose no issue. But even here, I’m already questioning whether the display is necessary and how much convenience it adds. You can perform several of these functions through the remappable earbud gesture controls with the case stowed away. And yes, they’re all present in JBL’s app on your phone.

I’m doing my best to ignore the possibility of ads on an earbuds case someday

But *some* inherent benefits do come with the screen. For one, there’s never any mistaking whether or not your earbuds are charging or how much battery remains. I can’t tell you the number of times I’ve wound up with one fully charged AirPod — insert any earbud brand here, honestly — and the other fully depleted just because the contacts needed cleaning or didn’t align perfectly. But with the Tour Pro 2, that information is always visible in a small font at the top of the display. And since it’s the most pressing data for earbuds, it remains there as you swipe through the other widgets.

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a:hover]:text-black [&>a:hover]:shadow-underline-black dark:[&>a:hover]:text-gray-e9 dark:[&>a:hover]:shadow-underline-gray-63 [&>a]:shadow-underline-gray-13 dark:[&>a]:shadow-underline-gray-63″>*It’d be nice if you could see track information on the screen.*

I haven’t uncovered any singular compelling reason that will keep me using the JBL Tour Pro 2 in place of my favorite wireless earbuds. The surefire battery status is handy, but I’m too set in my ways to give earbuds valuable pocket space. That’s true for this first try, at least.

This concept isn’t going to begin and end with JBL — or HP, for that matter. I predict we’ll see others try their hand at “smart” earbud cases. Truthfully, no idea has ever struck me as more Samsung, but I suppose the Galaxy Watch lineup covers similar bases. Maybe someone will figure

out a brilliant reason for earbuds to have a screen. For now, this feels like one screen too many.

But I can’t knock creativity and an attempt at something new. The Tour Pro 2 don’t measure up to the best earbud contenders when it comes to sound, but they definitely have a unique gimmick. They’re offbeat and weird. Let’s keep getting weird. Something good has to come out of that.

Photography by Chris Welch / The Verge

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