

Lightspeed Zulu ANR Headset

The Lightspeed Zulu had the most to say in the headset comparison. I've heard some really good reviews about the Lightspeed Zulu from my other pilot friends and wanted to see... I must try the proof for myself. I couldn't wait to try out the Lightspeed Aviation Zulu.

The Lightspeed Zulu was delivered a several days later and the first thing I noticed about them was the extremely light weight. They seemed very light and well made; not flimsy, just solidly built. Turns out the reason for the light weight is the construction from stainless steel and 4 different type of composite plastics. Take the ear cups for example, which I learned later are made from magnesium. The magnesium gives the Zulu's earcups plenty of rigidity and makes for an excellent sound barrier which means even when moving around the cockpit or turning your head, your going to keep the noise out. The other thing I noticed about the headset when it arrived was Zulu's controller. I noticed the controller had some extra buttons that I wasn't familiar with, but I'll get to that in a second.

The Zulu Review

My first flight using them was in the Beechcraft Premier, which has quite a bit of blower noise in the cockpit. I typically put on my headsets right after the engine start and I noticed almost immediately (very comfortable by the way) that the passive noise reduction was very impressive. Even with no ANR (active noise reduction) turned on, the headsets were very very quiet. I did turn the ANR on (the light (A) starts blinking green) and it suddenly got VERY quiet up front. I could tell it was noticeably quieter than the Bose. Almost too quiet (I kind of like a little engine noise...I get a little nervous when I think the engines have stopped).

zulu-controllerI was told by another Zulu owner that one feature I had to try out was the bluetooth connectivity feature. Bluetooth is a type of short-range wireless network that allows other Bluetooth equipped devices to share information and data. For example, my phone (the Blackberry Storm) is a bluetooth enabled cell phone. I can actually link the Lightspeed Zulu's to my Blackberry Storm and use the Lightspeed Zulu Headset as a handsfree device! It didn't take me too long to figure out this feature either. You simply hold down the bluetooth button (F) on the Zulu's controller for 5 secs (it will flash blue /red) and then set-up your phone to connect (or "pair"). It takes a couple seconds to find your phone and you might have to click "allow" on your BB Storm to confirm the bluetooth connection. But once connected, there are a couple of neat things you can do, like:

- * Press the Bluetooth button (F) on the Lightspeed's controller once for voice dialing (if supported by your phone).
- * Press the Bluetooth button once to answer the phone when it rings.
- * Press the Bluetooth button once to disconnect from a call.
- * Press and hold the Bluetooth button for 2 seconds to redial the last number called. Use the Bluetooth volume buttons (Zulu's + and - buttons {H}) to adjust volume.

Lightspeed Zulu

Written by Mongoose Bikes

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Once I tried out these features, I had an idea: What would the Zulu's controller do if I put my Storm in media player mode? Turns out, now Zulu's controller acts as a music player remote control! I can play, stop and adjust the volume on the Storm's media player. And as I was listening to the music, I pushed another button (D) on the Lightspeed's controller, "FRC". FRC stands for Front Rear Channel and it is simply an amazing audio feature. Headsets are notoriously awful for recreating true stereo. Stereo music is designed to be listened through stereo speakers not headsets. I'm not an audiophile, but apparently it has to do with the way that music is mixed in the studio, it is not designed for headsets. All I know, is that when I pushed the "FRC" button on the Lightspeed controller, I thought I had suddenly slipped on a pair of audiophile quality headphones, not a pair of aviation headsets. The sound quality was absolutely stunning. In fact, I called up one of my passengers to try it out for himself. I had him put on the headsets while it was not in FRC mode and then I pushed the FRC button while some music was playing (streaming via bluetooth from my Storm) and he was quite impressed. He said, "Sounds like a pair of expensive home audio headsets". The other neat thing about listening to music while flying was the Auto MusicMute feature which dims the music volume by 80% when radio communications come in from the panel. That way you don't miss any important radio calls, but the music stays low enough to hear it in the background.

My only complaint about the Lightspeed Zulus (and it's kind of a big one) was the clamping force. After a couple other flights, I determined that with my big head, I can only wear the Zulu's for 3 hours max and then my head needs a break. I don't know if this is due to my hat size or the headsets and since I can't use another head other than my own for a test control, I'm going to have to come to the verdict that they clamp just a little too tight for me (they might be fine for you).