

A PLUG FOR PLUGS

Dear Technoid,

Years ago I used Sonic ear plugs, the last 7 / 8 yrs I have used the molded ear plugs, the kind they do for you at the bigger shoots for about \$35.00. The trouble I'm having with the molded kind is they keep tearing, I'm on my 3rd set. Question is, are the sonic plugs as good as the molded kind?

Thanks,
Roger

Dear Roger,

I've talked to a lot of audiologists that I meet at the gun shows when they are selling molded plugs. All of them will tell you that the Sonic valve plugs are inferior to the molded plugs. I believe that too. I use Sonics when I'm grouse hunting because I can hear pretty well with them and know that I won't be firing more than half a dozen shots during the day. BUT... for any kind of sustained shooting you want better protection than the Sonics afford.

I've tried molded plugs several times and have never found them to be as affective as the ordinary EAR brand yellow foam plugs. I don't think that the noise ratings are as high either. In my opinion (and remember that I am not an audiologist), properly fitting, high quality ear muffs are the best. Note that all ear muffs are not the same. You need a tight fit in order to properly seal around the shooting glasses. Thin muffs don't do as good a job as thick muffs.

After good muffs, the next best are the foam ear plugs. They expand to fit the ear and always fit perfectly. Moulded ear plugs can be very good if they fit perfectly, but you never really know. If you have a set of molded plugs, do your own comparison test against the foam plugs. I'll bet that the foam plugs win out and you hear less gunfire though them. I don't know how much damaging noise is absorbed through the bones around the ear. Muffs would protect that, while plugs wouldn't. I do note that when shooting pistol at an indoor range, no one wears plugs. Everyone wears muffs.

Unfortunately, some shooters aren't comfortable with foam plugs. For them the molded plugs might be best if they can't use muffs due to a broad brimmed hat or similar. Also, if you want electronic ear plugs, you pretty much have to go molded.

I tried a set of expensive molded electronic ear plugs. The electronic part was great and worked exactly as advertised. But the moulding of the plug didn't fit my ears perfectly and after a while they loosened up just enough to let uncomfortable noise penetrate. I'm sure that was just my personal case as most people don't have a problem getting a good custom fit. That said, the cheap foam plugs never loosen up. They stay put until you remove them. Just because foam plugs are cheap, don't think that they are ineffective. Read the NRR (Noise Reduction Rating) on the package. The EAR throw-away foam plugs are NRR 29. That is very high. I believe that the efficiency of the protection increases geometrically with the noise rating number, not

arithmetically, so an increase from NRR 24 or 26 to 29 is quite significant. Of course, I still believe that the earth is flat, so you should do a reality check and ask a professional who really knows.

Bottom line: In my opinion good muffs are the best (emphasis on "good" muffs-most are too thin), then foam plugs, then molded plugs, then Sonics, then cigarette filters. If the molded plugs are a perfect fit, they are great, but the foam plugs are always a guaranteed perfect fit because they expand to fit even the ear canal of a cocktail party gossip.

Best regards,

Bruce Buck
Shotgun Report's Technoid