Since early 2008, I’ve been running regularly, and in October of 2010, I started logging my miles on dailymile.com, a social networking site for athletes; to date, I have recorded 7,157 miles over 997.86 hours.  During most of that time, I’ve listened to podcasts, Brewers games, and music, and I’ve gone through three pairs of wired headphones and, after I joined the masses as a smartphone owner, one pair of wireless bluetooth headphones, the SoundBot SB220.  Cutting the cord and letting the bluetooth flow was absolutely glorious, but I managed to kill my SB220 after I let a year and a half of sweating corrode its charging port. I can’t go back to the cord; only bluetooth will do.  I’ve found three comparable bluetooth headphone sets on Amazon.com.  To help me decide which to buy, I made a comparison chart:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **SoundBot SB221** | **Motorola S305** | **Kinivo BTH240** |
| **Price** | $17.99 | $21.95 | $24.95 |
| **Form factor** | On and behind ear - foldable | On and behind ear - non-foldable | On and behind ear - foldable |
| **Music playback time** | 20 hours | 8 hours | 10 hours |
| **Standby time** | 300 hours | 400 hours | 200 hours |
| **Bluetooth range** | 33 feet | 33 feet | 30 feet |
| **Charging time** | 2-3 hours | 1 hour | 2-3 hours |
| **Weight** | 2.51 oz. | 4.8 oz. | 2.57 oz. |
| **Built-in mic** | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| **Other features** | Sweat resistant | 3 EQ presets | Can be paired with up to 5 devices; but only one device can be connected at a time |
| **Average Amazon.com rating** | 4/5 stars  63 customer reviews | 4/5 stars  4,291 customer reviews | 4/5 stars  4,920 customer reviews |

A quick glance at the chart reveals a number of similarities between these products.  All three have a built-in microphone for making hands-free calls, they share the same on and behind the ear form factor, their bluetooth range is within three feet, and they received the same average customer rating of four stars on Amazon.com.  Having well over 4,000 customer reviews each, the Motorola and the Kinivo appear to be dependable and well-liked, but I would not shy away from the SoundBot based on its average four-star rating from just 63 reviews; I’ve purchased plenty of products with fewer reviews, and I haven’t experienced any disasters.

I wouldn’t want to charge the headphones before every run, and with a music playback time of at least 8 hours, this shouldn’t be an issue.  Since the Motorola has 400 hours of standby time, I could get away with charging it only once every two weeks, assuming I use it only for running.  That’s pretty awesome.  Its one hour charging time is also pretty awesome.  However, for just an additional hour or two of charging time, I could get double the music playback time from the SoundBot, which would allow me to use the headphones while working around the house and still wait a week or more between charging.

Anyone even mildly acquainted with me knows I’m a cheapskate, and even though there’s only up to $25 at stake, saving $7 with the SoundBot SB221 appeals to me. With a $25 price tag, the Kinivo seems to offer quality sound at an affordable price; many of its reviewers comment on its well-balanced and clear sound quality, which even seems to please self-proclaimed audiophiles.  Sound quality comments in the reviews of the SoundBot and the Motorola are all over the place.  Sure I like good quality sound, but I’m no audiophile, and since I use my headphones mostly while running outdoors, I need to be more focused on my surroundings than a few notches in sound quality.

I’d probably be happy with any of these headphones, but for me the SoundBot has the edge.  Sure the Motorola offers 3 EQ presets and the Kinivo can pair up with five devices, but these headphones will take a beating.  I run outside year round, and I’ve been caught in rain, sleet, and snow more than I’d like to acknowledge.  Also, I sweat profusely regardless of conditions.  In summer, I’ll have sweat flying from my shoelaces after running only two or three miles, so the SoundBot’s sweat resistant claim really stands out.  This unit also offers, by a wide margin, the longest music playback time, and not only do they weigh the least, they’re the least expensive.

The Motorola and the Kinivo have their strengths, and they’ve satisfied thousands of reviewers.  I have no doubt they’re both quality products, but I hope the SB221 offers the best bang for the buck.  Some might say you get what you pay for, but even if the SB221 last only a year or two, I’ll be able to put the $7 I saved to good use on my third pair of bluetooth headphones.