

Samsung Galaxy Buds 2 Review: A taste of the good life at a price you can swallow

August 13 2021, by Ryan Waniata, Usa Today



Credit: Samsung

Samsung's new Galaxy Buds 2 are the rare example of a pair of earbuds that feel much more premium than their price point suggests. The latest Galaxy Buds offer a light and stylish design, respectable active noise canceling and a pack of features that easily puts the geriatric AirPods to shame. While I wish they were a bit more water-resistant, these earbuds offer serious punch for their price, making them an enticing draw for Samsung phone owners—and just about anyone else.

If you're not quite sure where the Galaxy Buds 2 fit in the Samsung earbuds lineup, you're not alone. With the Galaxy Buds+, the bean-shaped Galaxy Buds Live and the more recent flagship Galaxy Buds Pro all releasing in the last two years, Samsung's willingness to experiment has no doubt led to some confusion. But practice makes perfect. The Galaxy Buds 2 borrow many of the best aspects of GBuds before them to achieve a brilliant balance of value, design, and features. They're also proof that, when it comes to wireless earbuds, Samsung is rolling.

About the Samsung Galaxy Buds 2

Here are the main specs for the Galaxy Buds 2:

— Price: \$149.99

— Battery life: Up to 5 hours playback with ANC, 7.5 hours without; 3 full charges in the case

— Rapid charging: 10 minutes for 1 hour of playtime

- Wireless charging: Yes, Qi-certified case
- Colors: Graphite, White, Olive, and Lavender
- Connectivity: Bluetooth 5.2
- Sensors: In-ear detection/auto-pause
- Microphones: 2 outer, 1 inner beamforming mic per bud
- Audio codecs: AAC, SBC, Scalable (Samsung proprietary)
- Dust/water resistance: IPX2
- Fit: 3 sizes silicone eartips
- Weight: 5 grams per earbud, approx. 41.2 gram charging case

The Galaxy Buds 2 arrive in Samsung's now-standardized micro-sized box. Accessories include three sets of silicone tips and a USB-C to USB-A charging cable. The cube-shaped charging case also looks identical to the previous two pairs of Galaxy Buds, while the rounded buds inside seem like an amalgamation of all three previous pairs. Standout design features include a two-way speaker configuration, three beamforming mics with AI for clear calling and sensors on the interior for auto-pause—all traits you'll find on the Galaxy Buds Pro.

What We Like

Light and stylish little eggs

While not as distinctive as the kidney-bean Galaxy Buds Active, the Galaxy Buds 2 have an aesthetic somewhere between "quail egg" and

"peanut M&M." The spherical buds are especially attractive (and egg-like) in Storm Trooper white, though they also call a bit of attention when placed in the ears, beaming in the sun with a futuristic flare.

The earbuds feel light and airy in your hands and, more importantly, in your ears thanks to a design that shaves 20% of the weight from the Galaxy Buds+. Each bud is 5 grams, equalling the AirPods Pro and standing as the lightest pair of Galaxy Buds yet. This makes the Buds 2 breezy and relatively comfy to wear for hours. The only slight hesitation I have is the ear tips, which are few in number and also feel a little cheap.

Respectable ANC for the money

The fact that a pair of \$150 earbuds could sport Active Noise Cancellation (ANC) at all shows just how far wireless buds have come. While the market has been thick with knockoff brands and upstarts brandishing ANC at low prices (to mostly disappointing results), only in the last few months have we seen name-brand pairs offer it well below the \$200 price point. The new Beats Studio Buds are the most notable example. (Jabra's Elite 75t also added it in a firmware update post-launch.)

The Galaxy Buds 2 are somewhere on par with the Beats buds in this department, effectively carving off drone sounds (like airplane engines) and some higher register noise like keystrokes. It's especially effective with a bit of music playing, creating a welcome cocoon of relative tranquility, though you'll definitely hear some of the higher frequencies slipping through.

The Gbuds 2 even stand up well against Samsung's Pro model. While not as effective at killing lower drone sounds during our Airplane engine test, when I tested the buds with a Pink Noise generator, they compared

better against the Buds Pro, both of which seem to either create or let through a fair bit of upper-register white noise. That's also an issue with Apple's AirPods Pro, though I find Apple's pair to be more effective against upper register noise than Samsung's.

The Galaxy Buds 2 have more trouble keeping up with the comprehensive ANC exhibited by Jabra's Elite 85t, and fall well behind the noise-smashing champions like the Sony WF-1000XM4 and Bose's QuietComfort Buds, the top two in the business. But with a price tag that's just over half what those top-tier models cost, there's not much to complain about here.

A well-stocked larder of features

As mentioned above, the Galaxy Buds 2 cream the standard AirPods where features are concerned, winning handily with options like ANC and adjustable transparency mode alone. You'll also find other handy features the AirPods employ like the ability to use one earbud at a time, sensors to pause the music (though only when both buds are removed), and the ability to track down your missing buds via Samsung's SmartThings Finder.

Samsung's Wear app unlocks plenty more, too, pushing the GBuds 2 well ahead of Apple's minimalist Beats Studio Buds, including a handful of EQ presets to choose from (though no multi-band EQ), more ways to tune controls, and a wireless charging case. There are also Samsung-only features like Bixby wakeup, a Spotify shortcut, and auto-connection to other Samsung devices. While there's only one flavor of ANC here, you can also adjust the transparency mode to tweak how much audio your earbuds let in to keep you aware of your environment.

You won't get the ultra package that comes with the Galaxy Buds Pro, with features like 360-audio head tracking with newer Galaxy phones or

speaking-to-chat (some of which are more useful than others). Instead, Samsung has adopted a strategy of smart compromises, giving you the majority of the most useful options to keep things under budget.

Zippy and detailed Samsung sound

The Galaxy Buds 2 were a bit too snappy for me when I first put them in, with a sharp edge when it came to brighter percussion and instrumental attacks. However, the fact that I was listening to the white-hot sounds of my '80s playlist no doubt had something to do with that, and perusing the EQ, I found the "Soft" preset is just my jam for these buds.

Once adjusted, I've quite enjoyed the Galaxy Buds 2 which, like other Samsung buds of late, are tuned to offer a bit of zeal in the timbres of instruments like horns and guitars, and in so doing, really bring out some lovely colors. The brassy guitar strings and dripping synths in Beck's "The Golden Age" show off the earbuds' attention to detail as well as their relatively expansive soundstage, while boomier tracks like Ty Segall's "Whisper" prove the buds have some spunk down low as well.

Overall, there's good balance here (striking on theme for these buds), especially in the midrange and lower registers. While they don't quite reach the vivid, textural heights of the Galaxy Buds Pro, it's a pleasant listening experience that upends the AirPods handily, and also outshines the thinner, less balanced sound of the Beats Studio.

Good call quality

While I haven't had a ton of opportunity in the past week or so to test the Galaxy Buds 2 in noisy, windswept crowds—which their three-microphone, AI-deployed system is designed to assist—calls have been

clear and without incident on either end. That's a win on its own, as so many earbuds I try seem to have trouble with just basic calling, easily distorting or even swapping the caller between the stereo channels.

What we don't like

Minimal water resistance

With an IPX2 water-resistant rating, you'll have to be a bit more thoughtful with these buds than most when it comes to sweating to the oldies or braving the elements. You can definitely sweat a bit on a hot walk, but a hot run may be more questionable.

Some will note that plenty of folks work out with the original AirPods, which provide zero (official) water resistance. But most buds these days provide IPX4 resistance at least, meaning they're approved for water splashes over 5-10 minutes. It's all the stranger considering the Galaxy Buds Pro's IPX7 rating, which makes them fully dunkable. IPX2 is something, but it's about the least "something" you'll find these days.

Touchy controls that can't quite do it all

I make no bones about my general preference for push-button controls over touch sensors, simply because I find them easier and more accurate in daily use. Like all Galaxy Buds before them, the Buds 2 let you tap your way to controlling playback, calling, song skipping, and engaging ANC and transparency mode, and it generally works well. Still, you're likely to find yourself accidentally tapping away a song or podcast when you adjust the buds at times.

Moreover, while there is an option for onboard volume control (unlike the AirPods or Beats Studio) by reconfiguring the long press action in

the app, you do have to trade out another action. The result is, you'll likely be choosing between ANC/Transparency mode or volume, both of which are most convenient when you're active and have your phone in your pocket.

Then again, this is true with the \$280 Sony WF-1000XM4, so the GBuds are far from alone here. Additionally, Samsung added a rather odd but appreciated side-tap control to give the Galaxy Buds Pro independent volume control with a firmware update, so that may happen here down the road.

One other point to note: by default, the earbuds don't offer tap controls for song skip; you have to toggle them on in the Wear app.

Battery life isn't the best (or the worst)

This is less of an issue with these buds than others, simply because of the price point. With 5 hours of battery playback with ANC, and 7.5 hours without it, the Galaxy Buds 2 fall short of what I consider "next-gen" battery life—but it's not awful. In fact, it's almost directly in line with the pricier Galaxy Buds Pro, and also circles our top earbuds, the Jabra Elite 85t. In addition, depending on your volume, you may be able to eke out a bit more.

And of course, there's also the charging case, which offers three extra charges (one short of the AirPods) and can get you an hour of playback in around 10 minutes (which I tested). This is less of a con, and more of a PSA that battery life as a whole for true wireless earbuds is indeed moving past the 5-hour mark, and will continue to do so.

Should you buy them?

Yes, they offer excellent features and performance for the price.

The Galaxy Buds 2 aren't just a pretty face. They're light and comfy, offer plenty of features and pack good sound and stability in performance, all at a great price point. Extras like ANC may soon be the norm for entry-level buds, but right now it's still a rare sight and one that usually requires you to compromise a fair bit. For the most part, the Galaxy Buds 2 compromise just where they should.

There are some solid alternatives, of course, including Samsung's own Galaxy Buds Pro, which offer better all-around performance, much better water resistance, and often cost just \$20-30 more on sale. That said, while their semi-open design keeps you from feeling locked up, I find the Galaxy Buds 2 more natural, probably because they're simply lighter in the ear.

The Beats Studio Buds are another good option for the money, but their sound isn't as full or detailed, and while they're a bit more robust, their minimalism means sacrificing some features. Finally, while they haven't made an appearance yet in this review, Amazon's Echo Buds 2 are similarly appointed and also offer excellent value, alongside easy access to Amazon Alexa (if you're into that). I think the Galaxy Buds 2 offer much better styling, though.

While you won't get the world in Samsung's latest earbuds, you will get a pretty good taste of what more expensive earbuds offer at a price that would be shocking just a year or two back. If you want a pair of earbuds that offer a moderate taste of the good life at an equally moderate price, these buds should be under serious consideration.

Pre-order the Samsung Galaxy Buds 2 for \$149.99.

More information: www.samsung.com/global/galaxy/galaxy-buds2/

(c)2021 U.S. Today

Distributed by Tribune Content Agency, LLC.

Citation: Samsung Galaxy Buds 2 Review: A taste of the good life at a price you can swallow (2021, August 13) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2021-08-samsung-galaxy-buds-good-life.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.