





One would think that the market was becoming oversaturated but don't tell the folks at **Paradigm** or MartinLogan that because they are in total attack mode right now. The new **Shift** series from the Canadian manufacturer has been garnering great press; and would you really expect Paradigm to make crappy headphones? Seriously. The \$99 **E2m** In-Ear headphones are here to play.

#### **Wax on. Wax off.**

I must confess that in-ear headphones have never been my thing. One bad date as a teenager with a Q-tip and I've pretty much avoided sticking things in my ears ever since. Large dorky over-the-ear cans have always been my preference which probably explains why my headphone of choice at home are the AKG K 702s. In-ear headphones only became necessary when I started running again at 4am. The AKGs require a headphone amplifier so that pretty much rules them out in that role. One can't run with a donut and headphone amplifier at the same time. Where would you put the donut?

Apple may have made earbuds and in-ear headphones all the rage thanks to the iPod and, later, the iPhone (whether or not that was good for your hearing is another issue), but other manufacturers capitalized quickly on the revolution and offered dramatically superior products; Etymotic, Ultimate Ears, and Sennheiser among others.

Skip forward to 2012 and it's almost economic suicide for a manufacturer not to offer headphones. The popularity of online headphone forums such as [Head-Fi](#) and the creation of tradeshow focused exclusively on headphones, headphone amplifiers, and accessories, clearly indicates that the segment has matured. Consumers are spending billions of dollars on headphones; something which the high-end can't say in regard to loudspeakers, amplifiers, and cables.

The smart people in the high-end started offering amplifier products with headphone amplifiers (didn't receivers always do that?) and headphone amps have even begun showing up on external DACs (Digital Analog Converters), with Wadia's superb 121decoding computer as one example.

Paradigm didn't become one of the most successful loudspeaker manufacturers in the world because they are stupid, folks. Not only are their products technically sound (I survived their Anechoic Chamber of Death), but they sound great and offer tremendous value for the money.

But can they build a decent pair of headphones?

**No hockey on a Saturday night? What's a Canuck on the Jersey Shore to do...**



