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## Vertex Raptor-i Wireless Helmet Communicator Review

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These days, it seems like we are always connected and always within reach. Our “smart” phones, tablets, computers and even cars now bombard us with a constant stream of emails, messages, and updates demanding our attention. It’s no wonder that I’ve come to really enjoy those times when I can just roll-on the throttle and drown the noise of the world in the rumble of the motor and the rush of speed.

And yet, when you ride a lot, or venture on longer trips, being connected can become a valuable option.

You may need to answer a phone call, talk to your passenger or fellow riders, or just decide to listen to music for a while. Fortunately, if you do want to have connectivity to your phone, GPS and media on the bike, there are several kits on the market that will help you do just that.

For our first round of reviews of wireless communicators, we will test the new system from Vertex. Based in Singapore, Vertex is a brand already known around the world, but just now becoming available in the US.

### Specs and features

The M Series of Raptor-i, Wireless Helmet Communicator provides both intercom and wireless phone headset capability.

- 2.4 GHz Bluetooth wireless system
- Intercom range: up to 540 yards (with line of sight)
- Intercom connections: up to 3 users
- Cut-the-Noise™ noise cancellation technology
- Modes: Mobile Phone, Intercom, GPS, MP3 Player, and FM Radio (optional)
- Infrared handlebar-mounted remote control (optional)

### The test kit



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Our test set came with two Bluetooth receivers, two full-face helmet audio systems, and handlebar-mounted infrared wireless remote. The receiver units are rechargeable and use a common micro-USB charging connector, which makes it compatible with many Android phone and tablet chargers, and may therefore reduce the number of chargers you have to carry on a trip.

The infrared wireless remote unit comes with a mounting kit that provides several options for mounting it on just about any bike. The remote is powered by a watch battery and is not rechargeable, but the battery can be easily removed and replaced.

The components are well designed and built, with large, glove-friendly controls on the receiver and the remote.

### Test setup

We tested the Vertex Raptor-i with a Shoei Neotec modular full-face helmet. Our test bike was a 2010 Triumph Rocket III – a large displacement motorcycle with no windshield or fairing, which definitely makes for a noisy ride and just about the worst case scenario for any on-board audio system. Phone and music playback were tested using an HTC One Android phone.

### Fit and comfort

We had opted for the headphone/mic kit for full-face helmets, which meant the microphone attached to the inside of the chin bar section of the helmet with adhesive backing. For modular helmets like the Shoei Neotec, this set up is a bit of a stretch, literally, since when the chin bar is in the upward position, the microphone cable is at the limit of its length. Vertex also supplies an open helmet set up which includes the boom mic mounted on a flexible mount. This may be a better set up if you have a modular helmet, ensuring that the microphone remains in place when you lift the chin bar.



Photo courtesy of Vertex.

Fitting the headphones was simple. Most modern helmets offer built-in cavities next to the ears specifically for fitting in-helmet headphones. On our Neotec helmets, mounting the speakers was as simple as popping out the foam fillers from the ear cavities and attaching the adhesive-backed speakers in their place. Some tucking of cables ensured that the wires were out of sight, and the system became part of the helmet.



The receiver unit attached to the side of the helmet with a small Velcro-like pad with adhesive backing, allowing for easy removal and replacement of the receiver for charging. The infrared remote attached to the handlebars with minimal effort using the included mounting kit.



The entire setup fit well and did not feel out of place. However, one unexpected outcome of removing the foam earpieces from the helmet was that the helmet became noticeably louder when riding. The headphones alone don't provide sound insulation anywhere close to the foam pads provided by the helmet manufacturer. This drawback is certainly not unique to the Vertex system, but it is something to consider before fitting an in-helmet audio system.

## Sound quality

Vertex's patented Cut-the-Noise™ noise reduction technology works exceptionally well in the Intercom and Phone modes. Voices sounded clear and amplified, and the background noise seemed to just fade away. Communication was effortless and I did not need to raise my voice to be clearly heard by the person on the other end.

Everything worked well in the Intercom mode. We did, however, encounter one problem in the Phone mode with using voice dialing while riding. The phone frequently had trouble registering voice commands over the road noise. However, voice dialing worked flawlessly when the bike was stopped.

When it came to music playback, performance was a mixed bag. Playback sound was quite good with the bike stopped or at low speeds. However, at moderate to highway speeds, the audio was drowned out in the road and wind noise, and sounded thin and distant. Cranking up the volume to the max resulted in distorted sounding music.

There are likely several factors contributing to this weak music playback performance at speed. As we mentioned before, replacing the helmet's factory earpieces with the headphone speakers resulted in a lot of road and wind noise penetrating the helmet. That noise certainly

does not help when listening to music. Secondly, it seemed that Cut-the-Noise™ technology was not active during music playback, as it was during phone and intercom calls. This technology worked very well during the intercom and phone calls, and we hope Vertex will find a way to also leverage it for music playback. In the meanwhile, using optional in-ear headphones should provide better music playback quality.

## The verdict

The Raptor-i is an excellent intercom and Bluetooth phone headset with innovative noise reduction technology. If you are looking for a means of communication during your rides, Vertex offers a capable product at a very compelling price. If music playback is important to you, we recommend opting for the available in-ear headphones.

### Pros

- price
- noise cancellation
- fit
- remote control

### Cons

- music playback quality
- voice dialing at speed

## Score

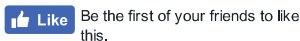
Value	5/5
Quality Fit and Comfort	4/5/5
Performance	4/5

Manufacturer's website: [vertexglobal.com](http://vertexglobal.com)

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