

Carry on with one smart backpack

Gadgets Choices for big sound in small speakers or sleek headphones, too.

By Gregg Ellman
Special to the Star-Telegram

I've had the ThinkTank Photo Airport Commuter backpack sitting around for a while. And when I finally got to test it out on a trip, I was thrilled.

I've tried a lot of backpacks, which claim they can hold a lot of gear and not be a strain on your back, only to be disappointed.

The Airport Commuter is on the other end. I filled it up and it held up as advertised and more.

I loaded it with a pair of DSLR cameras, 3 lenses, a flash, extra batteries and memory cards. In addition, I put a 15-inch MacBook pro and an iPad in separate compartments along with chargers and lots of cables and accessories.

If I organized it a little better, I'm sure I could have added even more.

The harness straps are padded and adjustable and include hardware to attach small accessories.

As with most Think-Tank products, a built-in raincoat is included along with lots of weatherproofing throughout the bag, which includes water-resistant material.

A medium-sized tripod or monopod can be attached to straps on the side of the bag.

Other features include a cable lock, business card holder, water bottle pocket and many storage compartments along with cell foam dividers, which create endless possibilities.

According to Think-Tank, the bag is designed to meet "international carry-on size requirements," which I can say I had no problem with.

www.ThinkTankPhoto.com, \$199.75

For big sound

The X-mini capsule speak-



The Airport Commuter backpack Think Tank



X-mini capsule speakers X-mini



Subject headphones Subject



FAVI mini wireless keyboard FAVI



ers are one of those "wow" devices I come across now and then.

Pocket-sized and portable, as advertised, they are far from small when you crank them up.

Each speaker measures about 2 inches in diameter by 1.5 inch high, but expand to 2 inches when you twist open each speaker.

Unless you use the Bluetooth, the 3.5 mini audio jack connection cable that comes out the bottom of

each speaker is easy to access and easy to hide when not in use.

For setup, just connect one speaker to your tablet, smartphone or any device playing your audio, and then connect a speaker to the first.

Each speaker is magnetized on the bottom, so you can attach them together for easy storage.

They come in many colors in three different setups; wired mono (\$39) or

wired stereo (\$59) choices (as tested) or a Bluetooth stereo system (\$79).

It's powered by a built-in rechargeable battery, which has a playback of up to 18 hours. A USB connection is on each speaker for charging (cable included).

www.x-mini.com

Loud and clear

Another choice for Bluetooth sound is the futuristic looking Subject Pulse Headphones.

After a while, you forget you're even wearing the great-sounding over-the-ear styled headphones, which pair up in seconds and have a flexible metallic headband connecting a pair of soft padded ear cups.

One side has a few control buttons for power, volume, track skipping, pairing, an LED light and a microphone for hands-free calls.

Depending on your volume level, expect about 10 hours of play time out of the crisp-sounding headphones or 11 hours of talk time.

www.subject.com \$99.99

Just the right type

The FAVI SmartStick Wireless keyboard is pock-

et-sized and pairs with Bluetooth devices to give you a standard keyboard in the palm of your hand.

It's designed with hot keys, a laser pointer and other specific functions for the Kindle Fire HD and other Android powered devices, although I connected it to an iPad and it worked just fine.

If you're not a fan of the virtual keyboard, this is for you since the backlit letters and numbers are all where you're used to from a standard keyboard along with shift keys on both sides.

A small touchpad is also built-into the right side, which includes full mouse control, tap to click and scrolling.

www.favientertainment.com, \$39.99

Penney

Continued from 1D

woman said the weekly travels aren't affecting the company's performance.

"Regardless of where our executives are based, their work requires extensive travel visiting stores and distribution centers; meeting with current and potential business partners across the U.S., Europe and Asia; as well as exploring new developments for possible expansion," spokeswoman Kristin Hays said.

While most of the company's leaders are based in Plano, "it's important that leaders devote their time and energy on transforming the company wherever their job responsibilities require them to be," she said.

"Several of the people who currently travel to Plano from other cities are in the process of setting up permanent residence here and are moving to the Dallas area," Hays said. "With all the travel retail leaders do, it doesn't always make sense to uproot and relocate their families, move them away from friends and family to a new city — only to be gone traveling to visit vendors, stores or overseas."

The company declined to make the commuting executives available for comment.

California Fridays

The merits of telecommuting and office face time have been debated recently after Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer ordered the staff to work in the office.

Being side by side with colleagues fosters collaboration and improves work

"speed and quality," Jackie Reses, Yahoo's executive vice president of people and development, said in a memo to employees when the change was announced.

The Penney executives who live in California often spend Fridays working in an office there after departing from Texas on Thursdays, the sources said.

Penney, with about 1,100 locations, has offices in Texas, California and New York, Hays said.

Remaining in California was part of Johnson's agreement to lead Penney.

He and his wife have school-age children and decided it didn't make sense to "uproot the family given his travel schedule," Hays said. Johnson was recruited to Penney in 2011 by billionaire investor Bill Ackman, whose Pershing Square Capital Management is the company's biggest shareholder, with an 18 percent stake.

Penney's human resources chief, Dan Walker, is also based in California, along with Vice President Sissie Twiggs and Senior Vice Presidents of Sourcing Amy Leonard and Donna Isralsky, the sources said.

Walker, Twiggs, Fay, Fisher, Laughrea and Miller have all worked at Apple, according to the sources, company announcements, public records and LinkedIn profiles.

In a list emailed to spokeswomen, Penney didn't dispute the names or the locations from which the executives are commuting.

DOPEs

The commuting slows some decision-making and has contributed to an adversarial relationship

between new executives and long-standing employees, the sources said.

Three people who worked in the headquarters said the acronym DOPE — short for "dumb old Penney employees" — has been used in the office to refer to the company's longtime workers.

Hays said she has never heard of that term being used.

"Their claim has no merit, and it misrepresents the level of respect and support we provide to one another," she said.

Johnson has cut more than 20,000 jobs to reduce costs as his turnaround struggles to gain traction. Penney employed 159,000 people as of January 2012, according to data compiled by Bloomberg.

Customers have been alienated by marketing missteps and a failed transition away from sales and coupons. Penney is betting that Johnson's plan to turn

most stores into collections of boutiques will fuel a return to growth by resonating with core shoppers and new customers.

Former CEO Allen Questrom, who retired from the retailer in 2004,

said this month that a turnaround won't work under Johnson and that the longer the board waits to fire him, "the worse it's going to get."

The company said March 12 that Johnson has

no plans to quit or resign.

Gross said: "If you're in a turnaround, you want everyone in the trenches with you at the same time. There's no substitute for having boots on the ground."

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http://www.loansmortgage.com						http://www.afmortgage.com										
30 yr fixed	3.125	1.000	\$1100	20%	3.374	30 yr fixed	3.500	0.000	\$0	20%	3.573					
15 yr fixed	2.500	1.000	\$1100	20%	2.773	30 yr FHA	3.250	0.000	\$0	3.5%	3.252					
30 yr FHA refi	3.375	0.000	\$1100	3.5%	3.881	20 yr fixed	3.375	0.000	\$0	20%	3.378					
Purchases, refinances, HARP program, Cash out Refis, open weekends						15 yr fixed						2.625	0.000	\$0	20%	2.629
FHA Streamline refis						AFR is a direct Fannie Mae and Ginnie Mae direct seller/servicer										
(B) 3630 North Josey Lane, Suite 213, Carrollton, TX 75007 NMLS# 143798						(A) 9 Sylvan Way, Parsippany, NJ 07054 NMLS# 2826										
30 yr fixed			15 yr fixed			5 yr ARM										
This week			3.85			3.03			2.82							
Last week			3.73			2.96			2.68							
Last year			4.15			3.38			3.14							

Source: Bankrate.com, for more information visit www.bankrate.com. Bankrate national averages are based on 100 largest institutions in the top 10 markets in the United States.

Legend: The rate and annual percentage rate (APR) are effective as of 3/19/13. © 2013 Bankrate, Inc. <http://www.interest.com>. The APR may increase after consummation and may vary. Payments do not include amounts for taxes and insurance. The fees set forth for each advertisement above may be charged to open the plan. (A) Mortgage Banker, (B) Mortgage Broker, (C) Bank, (D) S & L, (E) Credit Union, (BA) indicates Licensed Mortgage Banker, NYS Banking Dept., (BR) indicates Registered Mortgage Broker, NYS Banking Dept., (I) indicates Investment Advisor, (L) indicates Licensed Loan Officer, (M) indicates Mortgage Lender, (N) indicates National Mortgage Lender, (S) indicates State-licensed Mortgage Lender, (T) indicates Title Insurance Company, (U) indicates Underwriter. *Call for Rates" means actual rates were not available at press time. All rates are quoted on a minimum FICO score of 740. Conventional loans are based on loan amounts of \$435,000. Points quoted include discount and/or origination. Lock Days: 30-60. Annual percentage rates (APRs) are based on fully indexed rates for adjustable rate mortgages (ARMs). The APR on your specific loan may differ from the sample used. Fees reflect charges relative to the APR. If your down payment is less than 20% of the home's value, you will be subject to private mortgage insurance, or PMI. Bankrate, Inc. does not guarantee the accuracy of the information appearing above or the availability of rates and fees in this table. All rates, fees and other information are subject to change without notice. Bankrate, Inc. does not own any financial institutions. Some or all of the companies appearing in this table pay a fee to appear in this table. If you are seeking a mortgage in excess of \$417,000, recent legislation may enable lenders in certain locations to provide rates that are different from those shown in the table above. Sample Payment Terms - ex. 360 monthly payments of \$5.29 per \$1,000 borrowed ex. 180 monthly payments of \$7.56 per \$1,000 borrowed. We recommend that you contact your lender directly to determine what rates may be available to you. To appear in this table, call 800-599-4636. To report any inaccuracies, call 888-599-4636. <http://star-telegram.interest.com>