

Stax SR-L700

It would not be a stretch to call Stax “the first audiophile headphone.” Back when almost all other full-sized headphones were using dynamic drivers, Stax had already established itself as preeminent by using planar-electrostatic technology exclusively. Nowadays, however, audiophiles have their choice of planar designs from many other manufacturers at lower prices. Consequently, Stax needed an earspeaker in a more affordable package, so it developed the SR-L700 (\$1400). Unlike most headphones all Stax electrostatic earspeakers use special dedicated amplifiers to drive them, which increases the cost of a Stax system proportionately. (Combined with the SRM-007tII drive unit, an SR-L700 system runs \$3650.)

The SR-L700 utilizes the same “sound element” developed originally for the flagship SR-009. Stax calls this new ultra-thin polymer material “super-engineering plastics.” This Stax transducer also uses a special electrode scheme, which Stax named MLER (multilayer electrodes). The company’s intention was to create a thinner, lighter, stronger diaphragm material coupled with a thinner, lighter, and more powerful electrode array, and it has succeeded on both counts.

Where the SR-L700 differs from the SR-009 is that instead of the round enclosure featured on that model, the SR-L700 uses the traditionally shaped Stax Lambda Pro rectangular enclosure, headband, yoke, and earpads. A manufacturer could assemble the finest-sounding personal transducer ever made but if it doesn’t fit well, it’s sure to be a failure. The Stax Lambda Series has long been considered among the most comfortable headphone designs ever devised, and the SR-L700 continues this tradition.

The SR-L700, like almost all Stax earspeakers, is an open-back unit. That means it is intended for private listening at home in a quiet environment. If you need isolation and portability, the SR-L700 is not your best option.

The first time that you hear a pair of Stax electrostatic headphones, regardless of model or manufacturing date, the primary impression they make, if distilled down to a single word, is speed. The transient response of a Stax electrostatic design, when compared to a more conventional dynamic driver design, seems “faster,” with less additive distortion stemming from the mechanical action of the driver itself. With its lower mass, an electrostatic diaphragm moves with less physical impedance and once in motion can stop with less electronic damping because it has lower mass than a comparable dynamic driver.

The second thing that many will notice is the headphones’ unique bass character. The Stax low-frequency presentation has always been airier and faster than other headphone technologies, but many of the earlier Lambda models lacked impact in what I refer to as “the meat and potatoes” upper-bass and lower-midrange region. While it still may not deliver enough low-end impact for serious bassheads, the SR-L700 definitely offers enough low end to keep anyone who prefers a balanced harmonic presentation happy.

The size and image specificity of the Stax SR-L700 soundstage is dependent on the energizer/amplifier that is attached to it. The tube-based SRM-007tII produced the largest and most precisely imaged soundstage, followed closely by the older SRM-007t, which is also tube-based. Using different electrostatic amplifiers with the SR-L700 shows



that these earspeakers “scale up” nicely. When you tether them to a better-performing amp, the SR-L700’s overall fidelity improves.

Mike Longworth, Martin Guitar’s longtime historian and A&R head, wrote, “The main competition of a new Martin guitar is an old Martin guitar.” The same can be said about Stax earspeakers. The Stax SR-L700 is the least expensive offering that uses Stax’s latest stator technology. As such, it is the first new design from Stax that could lure longtime Stax owners to replace their older Stax models. Whether the SR-L700 will also attract first-time Stax buyers is yet to be seen. But for those audiophiles who want to experience the company’s latest technology, the SR-L700 is simply the most cost-effective way to arrive at a new level of uncolored Stax sound. **Steven Stone**

SPECS & PRICING

Type: Push-pull, open-back, oval electrostatic headphone

Frequency response: 7Hz–41kHz

Electrostatic capacitance: 110pF (including cable)

Impedance: 145k ohms (including cable, at 10kHz)

Sound pressure sensitivity: 101dB/100V RMS, 1kHz

Maximum sound pressure: 118dB/400Hz

Earpads: Genuine lamb leather (direct skin contact), high-quality synthetic leather (surrounding portion)

Cable: Silver-coated 6N (99.9999%) OFC parallel 6-strand, low-capacity special wide cable, 2.5m full length

Weight: 0.8 lbs. w/o cable (1.1 lbs. with cable)

Price: \$1400/£1195 (\$3650/£TBA with SRM-007tII amp)