



## Stealth Acoustics StingRay Environmental Speaker

By Dennis Burger August 29, 2013

As a scientifically minded person, there are few things in this world that excite me more than having my mind changed. Or, to put it another way, being proven wrong. Combine that with my outright geekery for all things AV, and when I find myself forced to change my mind about a speaker, it's a doubly exciting to-do. Which, now that I think about it, would be a pretty nifty marketing slogan for Stealth Acoustics' new outdoor speaker: The StingRay, doubly exciting to-do. Or perhaps I should stick to reviewing and let Stealth Acoustics work out its own marketing.



At any rate, the Stealth Acoustics StingRay is certainly one of the most unusual speakers I've seen in quite some time. Its an impenetrable glass fiber and UV-protected ASA plastic monolith, completely sealed from the elements, with an internal neodymium motor and 8-inch low-profile woofer that turn the entire face of the speaker into a radiating surface with a reported frequency response of 35Hz to 20kHz. And when I say impenetrable, I do mean impenetrable; the only holes to be found anywhere on its surface are for the four potential mounting bracket locations. It even lacks binding posts, with the speaker cables coming out of a sealed port on the back.

The result is that you could very well submerge the StingRay in water or leave it out in the snow in sub-freezing temperatures and not worry about a thing. Its flexible mounting options also mean you can stick it just about anywhere you can imagine outdoors, whether you're hanging it vertically or horizontally from the ceiling, planting it on a spike in the ground in the middle of the yard, or even hanging it high (or planting it low) and angling it 30 degrees or thereabouts thanks to the mounting holes on its beveled back edge.

Given all of that, you'd think I would know better than to treat it like a typical speaker, but my first inclination when I unboxed the behemoth pair of StingRays (each measures nearly 21 x 15 x 4 inches) was to drag them out to the patio, wire them up, position them pointing perfectly toward my back porch swing, and sit down for a proper listening session.

And it took me all of five seconds to realize that I hated them. Sitting in my swing, with the StingRays at ear height, six feet away from me and perfectly towed in at about five feet apart, I queued up The Civil Wars' eponymous new album, thinking that the track "Dust" would make a good test of Stealth Acoustics' full-range claims. The song rests on a thick, rich bedrock of bass, with ethereal harmonies and sparse but sparkling instrumentation. Through the StingRays, though, head on, at least the luscious bass was buried by brittle, forward treble that gave the entire song a harsh, unpleasant edge.

I'd had enough before the track even came to a proper end, and stood up to head back inside, intent upon laying the groundwork for a very unfavorable review. But a funny thing happened on the trip from my butt to my feet. Once my head moved out of the direct line of fire, once I stopped listening to the StingRays as if they were electrostatic panels in a meticulous hi-fi setup, the sound improved. Dramatically so. The bass instantly thickened, mostly because the brittle treble calmed down into a silky smooth high end, and the overall tonal balance of the speakers evened out into a really nice even keel.

With that lesson learned, I pulled the StingRays down from their perch and placed them at the far ends of the patio, one askance, one askew, with an eye toward how one would be much more likely to place outdoor speakers. That is to say, I placed them where they would be out of the way. And quite frankly I thought they sounded better still. Stealth Acoustics claims a 170-degree vertical and horizontal dispersion pattern for the StingRay, but the truth of the matter is that they sound pretty rocking from just about any direction (assuming you're not directly in front of them). Granted, you get more of the sparkle when located generally in front of them, and the sound is much more tonally balanced, but if you have two or four or eight of them scattered sort of randomly around your landscape, I don't think any of party-going guests would complain about the sound. If anything, they're liable to ask where it's coming from. Because the StingRay simply doesn't look like a speaker.

Granted, you can't get too fussy about things like stereo imaging with the sort of random placement that the StingRays thrive on, but I was quite impressed that they managed to convey the very floaty, nebulous quality of Joe Purdy's "Isn't Love" with no problem.

Furthermore, I was downright shocked that the StingRays sound quite smashing with party music. I ran a few frequency sweeps in the outdoors and found that, for the most part, bass starts rolling off significantly closer to 40- or 45Hz than the 35 that Stealth Acoustics claims (and, conversely, they run out of high-end steam around 15kHz), but you wouldn't know that when listening to Beastie Boys' "Hey Ladies" from their re-mastered *Paul's Boutique*, or Fatboy Slim's "Right Here, Right Now." Both sounded absolutely thumping in the outdoor environment, with plenty of strong, pulsating bass and high frequencies that only occasionally dip into harsh territories if you approach the speaker from certain angles. So unless you listen to oodles of dubstep, I don't think it's really necessary at all to augment the StingRays with an outdoor subwoofer.

Mind you, I wouldn't call the Stealth Acoustics StingRay an audiophile speaker. I absolutely couldn't tell the difference between MP3 and FLAC rips of Fiona Apple's *Tidal* from any direction. But I seriously doubt that a backyard barbecue or lazy Saturday by the pool is the place where you're looking (or listening) for unimpeachable audio quality. The fact remains, though, that this incredible outdoor speaker sounds smashing, looks unlike anything you've ever seen, and pumps out a heck of a lot of audio without requiring a heck of a lot of power.

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[www.stealthacoustics.com](http://www.stealthacoustics.com)

Kudos

At \$475 each, the Stealth Acoustics StingRay represents an incredible value a truly weatherproof speaker that generates really rocking sound without a subwoofer.

Concerns

Although the StingRay sounds fantastic off-axis, its full-frontal frequency response can be a bit harsh.

Product Specs

Frequency Response: 35Hz to 20kHz

Power Capacity: 120 watts RMS; 60 watts minimum recommended power

Protection: Two independent self-resetting devices (low and high frequency)

Sensitivity: 83 dB (1 watt/1 meter)

Driver Components: High frequency: 1-inch (30 mm) neodymium motor

Low-frequency: 1-inch (25 mm) voice coil, low-profile 8-inch (203 mm) woofer with 20 oz. (622 gr) ceramic magnet

System Impedance: 8 nominal

Polar Dispersion: 170 degrees vertical and horizontal

Dimensions:

Width: 20-7/8 inches (530 mm)

Height: 14-3/4 inches (374 mm)

Mounting Depth: 3-7/8 inches (98 mm)

Included Accessories: Proprietary mounting bracket

Factory Finish Options: Matte White, Matte Black, Sand Stone Textured, Gray Stone Textured, and Jade Stone Textured finishes

Custom Finish Options: Finish options may include texturing, paint or adhesive vinyl appliqués (not included)