

## One Man's Journey Through The Stax Range (part.1.)



It was around 2 pm (everyone's least favourite time of the day) on Tuesday (everyone's least favourite day of the week) and the intercom began to buzz, I had a hunch what it was so I rushed down the stairs to the door where I was greeted by the courier "5 boxes for Adair Acoustic Design" he announced. My suspicion was right; it was the package that I had been waiting for. I got the boxes upstairs and opened them up.

Over the last month or so, whilst we have been setting up our showroom, I have tried and tested countless headphones but there was one name that I hadn't managed to get my hands on to properly try and it was the ones that have the biggest reputation. These were the ones that I really wanted to give a good test.

Inside was a selection of [Stax](#) systems from the entry-level SRS-2170 combination up to the reference SR-009 ear-speakers and SRM-007tII energizer.

Tuesday was now a good day.

I have made no secret of how much I like the Stax brand and their dedication to the art of audio, if you didn't read my previous blog on the history of Stax you can read it [HERE](#). I have looked at the brand, but now it was time to look in detail at the sound.

Often when I talk about hi-fi headphones to my non-audiophile friends they seem pretty bemused when I tell them that the reference Stax combo costs over £6,000. "For a pair of headphones? Are they worth it?" is normally the reply to which I would say "yes .... so I have heard". Well those times are over, I can now test out the whole range, and really give the question some proper thought and analysis.

I thought I'd start at the lower end of the range and review the SRS-2170 combination and the portable SRS-002 in-ear headphones and SRM-002 portable amp.

The SRS-002s are the only in-ear headphones currently available from Stax. They are still electrostatic so they need to be used with the SRM-002 portable battery-powered energizer.



The design of the SRS-002s is quite an original design, the buds are a larger than modern in-ears, they do not fit into the ear canal like an [Etymotic](#) IEM might, they rest in place just into the ear. The headband is made from a thin metal strip, much like the old [Sony](#) Walkman headphones from the 90s. For me, I have to say that I struggle to get comfortable in these headphones for more than an hour or so, the buds are a bit large for my smallish ears.

Sound-wise, it is a different matter because I could listen to these for hours and hours. The soundstage is very wide for IEMs, you get the feeling you are being surrounded by the music, it seems to come from all directions. There is no other

IEM that I have tried that is capable of giving such an open sound. The bass can at times be a little weak, though I find that it is more the higher bass notes that are a bit thin at times. When listening to Ray Charles' version of 'Fever', I was still feeling the rumble of the seismic bass notes.

The SRM-002 driver unit is a great little portable energizer designed to power the SRS-002s, it can run off just two AA batteries and isn't too bulky and large, I'd say it was about the same size as one of the original iPods (remember them, they are the ones with more than one button), so when it is strapped to an [Astell & Kern](#) it is easily manageable in a coat pocket. Unfortunately, you will struggle if you are in shorts and a t-shirt though (finally, a plus side to the Great British weather). When listening, I was using around ¼ of the max volume, if you like your music very loud.

Though the comfort is a bit of an issue, the SRS-002 really is the best option out there for people who want an electrostatic sound on-the-go. You worry when you hear 'Stax IEMs' that they will not sound like Stax, but these definitely have the distinct Stax sound.

That is electrostatic sound on-the-go covered, now let's look at electrostatic sound at an affordable price (well, somewhat affordable). The entry-level Stax full-size combination is the SRS-2170 comprising of the SRM 252S energizer and SR-207 earspeakers. The combination costs £745.00.



The SR-207s have the classic Stax Lambda look, large rectangular grill like cans with a somewhat rectangular headband and a comfort headband inside. Some people may not like the look of the Stax Lambda series but these are clearly cans that are to be worn in the home, so does it really matter?



The SR-207s have a long cable; it is more than long enough (roughly two meters). It is a wide sturdy feeling cable with a 5-pin plug. The cable is not detachable though like on some rival models. The SR-207s are reasonably light; lighter than the HiFiMAN HE-300's and their pads easily cover the ears. From the look of them, I thought they were not going to be comfortable, but I was wrong, these are very comfortable indeed.



I plugged the earspeakers into the energizer, linked it to the [Naim](#) server and began playing. I am fairly new to the Stax experience, I am not a veteran Staxer who has been listening for years, but the first thing you notice when you listen to Stax earspeakers is the space they give, the Stax sound is an airy and musical sound. It kind of feels like the band is dangling on strings beside your ears.

The SR-207s are subtle, they are not as powerful as the likes of the [HiFiMAN HE-6](#), but they have a more realistic, honest sound. The bass is substantial, but not booming however the earspeakers really keep a grip on the bass and control it brilliantly. The isolation is stunning too, I found that I was able to focus on certain instruments in-depth and pretty much block out everything. I thought I'd give this a real go, with Lemon Jelly's 'Space Walk', a 7-minute electronic track where instruments keep getting added one by one as the song goes on. Even at the climax I was able to focus intently on all the individual instruments, it was quite remarkable.



I then plugged the SR-207 into the SRM-007tII reference Stax energizer, to see how the sound would change, as you may have expected the sound grew, it was a fuller sound, it was as if someone had taken the soundstage and stretched it from each end slightly. The range was that bit bigger, but the thing that I was most impressed by with the SRM-007tII energizer was how intelligible the vocals sounded, when listening to Bob Dylan's 'Just Like a Woman' I could hear the croak in Bob's voice and the emotion came through excellently.

In my mind there is no doubt that the SRS-2170 combo is worth the £745.00 and there are 2 main reasons that I came to this conclusion, firstly when you think that the SR-207 earspeakers cost just £345.00 and then compare the sound to other headphones in that price band, there is nothing that I have tried that comes close to the clarity and enjoy-ability of the Stax. The second consideration is how much you would spend on a full hi-fi system capable of delivering sound comparable from these earspeakers. For me, it is easy to see why so many people choose to just use Stax at home instead of loudspeakers.

£745.00 is the starting point though, check out the blog next week where I will continue my look at the Stax range, working my way up to the SR-009s.