

Cooler Master Storm Sirius True 5.1 Gaming Headset Review

I recently reviewed the Roccat Kulo gaming headset which left me disappointed (and with soar ears). Recently the awesome people from Sonic Informed send me the CM Sirius to review... I was in for a surprise.

The Sirius is Cooler Masters first attempt at producing a quality gaming and multi-media headset. This is quite a challenge as it is a whole new ballgame. Even though CM produce hardware of great quality (many of my own hardware is CM). I did not expect too much from their first attempt, this is not your average peripheral; it's a device that communicates directly with your senses. It needs to be comfortable, produce good sound, look good and of course feature a mike if it is going to be used for gaming. Actually, CM took headphones to a whole new level, but let's start from the beginning.

As one would expect, the packaging is great, it features CM black and red colors, comes in a high quality box with a formed window to look at the craftsmanship inside. Strangely enough, inside the box, you won't find exactly what you expected. Huh? What else can be there besides the headphones and the wire that connects to your pc's sound card? How about a few gold plated USB connectors and a super high quality mixing console? That's not all, the 3.5mm cables are actually optional, you can leave your external speakers plugged into your sound card, yes, you can use either your speakers or headphones as you prefer, this without switching cables at all (done with software), this already won me over.



The tactical mixing console (as they call it) connects via two gold plated USB ports. This is to power the 2x4 speakers and of course provide the digital data for the external sound card inside the tactical mixer. My biggest gripe with surround sound headsets is the constant re-connections of speaker to headphones. This normally ended in just using one of them. I was very delighted to see that I can leave my speakers as is and just connect the headset to open USB ports. Mind you, for best performance the USB ports should be USB 3.0, anything older might be too slow and you will find yourself running out of USB capacity quickly resulting in all sorts of bugs. Setting up and installing the driver is a simple process, after a few minutes, you should be ready for action. At the end of the day your setup will route to a single wire powering your headset, it's out of the way and does not clutter your table.



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The control panel on the tactical mixer is of high quality making it feel like the controls found on an expensive hi-fi system. It also looks great; it's heavy and does not move around because of its weight and anti-slip pad below. There is one large level knob with three buttons on the console. Make no mistake, the tactical mixing console is not a gimmick, it serves a very important purpose. All games are different and might require a small tweak to certain elements, like the sound gunshots, footsteps background noises etc. The mixer also allows you to instantly set bass and volume. When I say instantly, I really mean, pushing the cycling button till you reach say for example REAR and adjust till you are happy. The levels are displayed neatly with an LED row indicator.

The headset itself is engineered to perfection, it is sturdy and very well balanced all round. It also looks very attractive. It comes with two easy to change ear “cushions”, one for breathable comfort the other for blocking out external noise, both are very comfortable actually. The great thing about this headset is that the earpieces does not actually touch your ears, they are large enough to comfortably sit far around your ears (even if you have big ears). The headset continues to support itself with a sturdy grip padded with a top head cushion. Overall, it is exceptionally comfortable even after many hours of gaming.

No drivers are shipped with the headphones; you are supposed to download latest drivers from the CMSTORM website. However, it is unfortunate to note that the drivers are from last year June, did they stop maintaining it? The reason why I am not happy with it is the fact that the UI console and headset does have a few software bugs. This might well be USB issues on my particular setup, but it is always nice to see up to date drivers nevertheless.

The software is ok; it can most definitely be improved, noting that the software is still powerful. It allows you quick access to sound features like equalizer, audio environment (music, games, multimedia) and then allows you advanced access to more powerful features.

The headset is true 5.1 surround sound and supports virtual 7.1 surround sound. I can imagine how difficult it is to engineer a headset that really sounds 3D. They nailed it with Sirius, there is a clear distinction between front and back, with various games, the surround effects was spot on.



Sound Quality

Theoretically according to specification both the headphones and the mike should produce results. The bass speakers might be on the underpowered side but with bass-reflex available in its software this is meant to limit distortion, and it does that very well. I tried out various modern games for a full week. To name but a few, Modern Warfare 3, L.A Noire, Shogun 2, Battlefield 3, etc. Throughout hours of gameplay my ears did not feel sore or tired, the comfort is incredible. Because of its 8 speakers one should not expect it to be too light, that is most probably why they limited the bass, preventing overweight, the balance between comfort and performance is very good. Overall, the gaming sound quality is truly

brilliant, deep, and crisp when needed and surprisingly maintained very solid bass. I should point out if you have a decent 5.1 soundcard; you might get better sound performance connecting it directly then the sound processor found on the tactical console mixer. However, for general gaming it won't be noticeable. You can't use the tactical mixer if you connect the headset directly to your sound card.

One thing I should point out is its true 3D sound it produces. I could clearly distinct noises all around me. Especially in MW 3, it sound brilliant when helicopters fly overhead, gunshots from behind, silent footsteps, my surrounding was enlightened by sound. It is important to note that when using the tactical mixer to set your software to use the correct pre-set equalizer (games, music and multimedia) for the best audio experience.

The mike also provides very solid recording, it is very responsive and records good quality, in-fact, one of the best build in mikes I have encountered in headphones. It is not all rosy though, when using the tactical mixer on USB 2.0 and your motherboard is having trouble providing enough USB data, your mike will be the first thing to suffer. This is not a shortcoming with the mike itself but rather communication channels.

The Sirius is marketed as a gaming headphone set, and achieves being just this very very well. It delivers beautiful, crispy and solid response. It produces 3D environments exceptionally well and handles explosions, gunshots and sudden bursts equally well.

According to the frequency response, the latter could be considered to be on the lower range for music. An entry level Sennheiser (R 1, 400) pushes the frequency to 26, 000Hz which results in purer music. However, Sirius focus is games, and the range is just perfect for this task. I should mention though, music and movies on the Sirius is still good enough. If I had to rank them from best I would have to go with Games (10), Movies (8), Music (7).



Conclusion

From the moment I opened the CMStorm Sirius I was impressed. This is my latest headset of choice; it is extremely comfortable and adds a new level of reality to my gaming experience. I love the fact that I don't have to change my speakers and headphones constantly, both stay plugged in. The only piece of the equipment that is not perfect would have to be the software, I wish for just one more version. Still, if you are looking for a new headset, I would recommend the CMStorm first in this price range. The Sirius retails around **R 1,350.00**

9.5/10 Platinum Award