

## SteelSeries H Wireless Headset review

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### Gamers' over-ear-headphones lose out

Product name: SteelSeries H Wireless Headset

Manufacturer: SteelSeries

Website: <http://steelseries.com/us/products/audio/steelseries-h-wireless>

Price: \$299.99

Fasten your seat belt, readers; this is going to be a rough-ride product review.

We live in an era of widespread downsizing—employees, computers, cell phones, even audio accessories have been downsized dramatically over the years. Downsized audio accessories include [earbuds, in-ear canalphones, and canalbuds](#) that many mobile users prefer over traditional non-downsized on-ear headphones. For gamers, however, traditional headphones might be the way to go because their larger drivers and earpieces often translate into higher audio quality and listening comfort with prolonged usage. I wish that were the case with [SteelSeries' H Wireless Headset](#), but testing for this review turned out otherwise.

The H Wireless Headset comes in a package that might best be described as massive (Figure 1A). The package measures 5.5" high, 9.75" wide, 9.75" deep; it tips the scale at about one pound sans product, about three pounds with product. Removing the package's illustrated cardboard sleeve reveals a jet-black cardboard box containing two black molded plastic inserts that securely hold the headset and its glossy jet-black plastic transmitter box in place (Figure 1B). Removing the inserts reveals the box's interior which contains a smaller jet-black cardboard box that holds some of the product's other accessories.



Figure 1. SteelSeries' H Wireless Headset, along with its transmitter box and other accessories, comes in a sizable package that weighs in at three pounds.

This product is marketed as a “[premium multi-platform wireless gaming headset](#).” Its signature feature is Dolby technology (details in a moment) “...[for use with virtually all media and gaming systems](#).” The “wireless” in this product’s name refers to its communication mode with the aforementioned transmitter box (1.25” high, 4.25” wide, 4.25” deep; 7.7 oz.) which comes with an OLED screen for displaying audio information, user profile’s configuration, and system’s settings.

The headset’s and transmitter box’s (Figure 2) [official specs](#) are as follows.



Figure 2. The H Wireless Headset is a gamer’s over-ear-headphone that communicates wirelessly with a computer or console via a radio frequency transmitter box.

### **Headset**

Frequency response: 20Hz - 20000Hz

Weight (without battery): 297 gm. (~10.5 oz.)

Maximum volume: 100dB\* SPL @ 1kHz

Ports: wired mode / share port; chat port; mini USB; firmware update port

### **Transmitter**

Wireless range: 12 m (40 feet) straight line

Latency: <16ms, fixed

Ports: analog in; analog out; mini USB, optical in, optical out, power

Battery type: rechargeable lithium-ion, 1000mAh

Battery life: 20 hours per unit under ordinary usage

### **Microphone**

Frequency response: 100Hz - 10000Hz

Mic pattern: Unidirectional

Indicator: red LED on mute

In addition to the transmitter box, the headset's other accessories include an English-only user guide containing drawings with limited written instructions; two thin rectangular rechargeable lithium-ion, 1000mAh batteries (one is a backup; they are officially rated at 20 hours each) for the headset; a power adapter for the transmitter box; four international plugs for the power adapter; and six black cables covered with a rubbery-feeling material. These cables include an optical cable for use with Xbox, Playstation, or computer; an analog cable; a "mobile" cable for listening to music while on the go; an Xbox chat cable; a USB cable; and a power cable that connects the transmitter box to the power adapter.

Wait a second...six *cables*? Although the H *Wireless* Headset can function wirelessly, it requires the transmitter box for use with a supported gaming platform. And the transmitter box, in turn, requires at least the USB cable if you choose to use it with a [computer](#). During testing, the USB cable (even with its excess length downsized into a tied bundle) occupied an inconvenient amount of space on my workstation's desktop. The transmitter box's power cable and plugged-in [power adapter](#) (to ensure sufficient power and to recharge the second, unused battery) made matters worse.

The space occupied by the USB cable was a relatively minor issue compared with usage issues that impeded testing for this review. The first usage issue that delayed testing was due to my (incorrect) expectation that the headset's wireless pairing protocol was Bluetooth. After looking fruitlessly through the product's user guide and online pages for instructions on how to pair the headset, my message to my contact person prompted the following reply. "...the headset's audio isn't delivered via Bluetooth, it uses radio frequency." Further details are included in an online [press release](#). "The H Wireless achieves this through a fixed-latency, frequency-hopping system that is continuous and automatically searches between available wireless frequencies to ensure responsive and uninterrupted audio performance for the listener."

The next issue that impeded testing for this review was my choice of platforms—an iPhone and an iPad. These mobile iDevices support a ton of games from Apple's iTunes App Store, plus movies, videos, and music that potentially could be enhanced by the headset's signature feature—[Dolby virtual 7.1 surround sound technology](#). After several weeks of reading and rereading the headset's printed user guide, plus reviewing information on SteelSeries' website (including the FAQs), I still was stuck on how to pair the headset with either of my iDevices. My contact person for this review solved this dilemma with the following response

to my inquiry. “For iPhone/Android...Wireless functionality with mobile devices isn’t something we offer just yet.” Major bummer.

This issue brings up a caveat for readers—if a product has Apple’s “Made for iPod, iPhone, iPad” logo, you can be pretty confident that the product will function as intended with those iDevices; otherwise, you could be out of luck. Apple’s logo is missing from the H Wireless Headset’s package and web site, leaving this review out of luck.

What’s not missing from the H Wireless Headset’s web site, however, is the following claim—“[PERFORMANCE ON ANY PLATFORM](#)” (Figure 3). This claim was still displayed on SteelSeries’ web site when I checked back during the third week of June 2014. Unless SteelSeries has a narrow definition of “any” and/or “[platform](#),” their claim seems just a bit misleading.

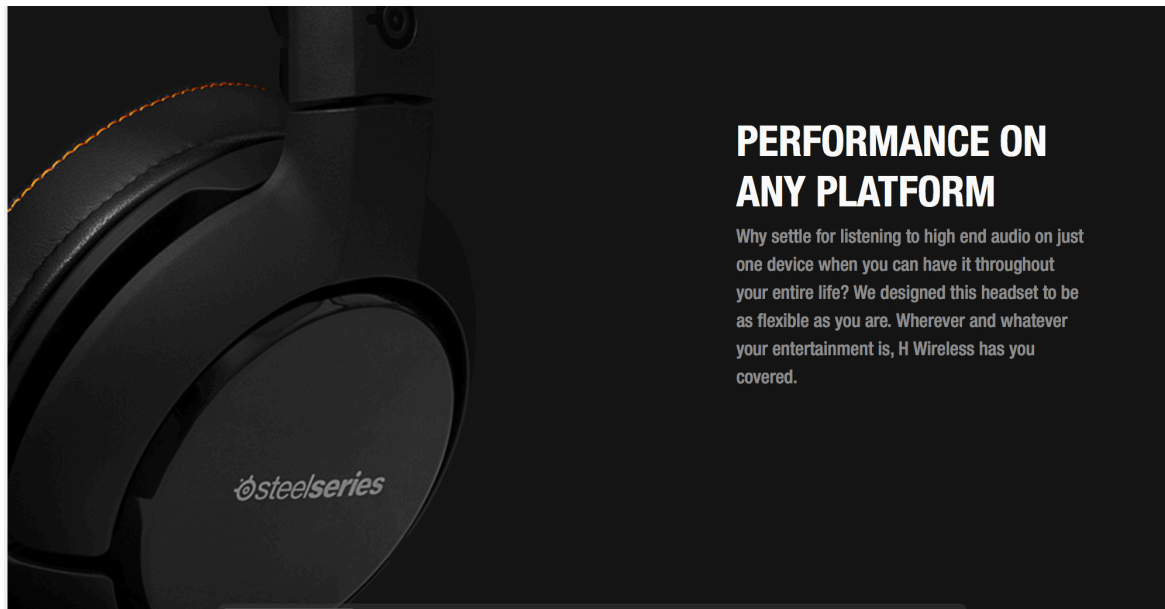


Figure 3. The H Wireless Headset’s web page clearly states that this product performs on “any platform” despite the fact that “Wireless functionality with mobile devices isn’t something [SteelSeries] offer[s] just yet.”

The next issue that impeded testing for this review was getting the transmitter box to function properly with my computer. Despite having successfully created a [profile](#) on the transmitter box and getting the transmitter to recognize the powered-on headset, no audio came out of the ear pieces’ drivers. I remained stuck after reviewing the user guide and [information](#) on SteelSeries’ web site.

To resolve this issue on which I was stuck, I decided to find out how the company’s support staff would respond without revealing my role as a product

reviewer. SteelSeries' customer support provides an online ticketing system that requires a user login, which in turn requires disclosing various personal informations. After creating my login and submitting a ticket request, the same-day reply asked me questions that already were answered in my ticket request.

*ComputerEdge:* I'm trying to use SteelSeries H wireless headset with a MacBook Pro (MBP).

The transmitter control box is connected to the MBP via USB (as shown in this message's attached file).

The headset is turned on and connected with the transmitter control box (as shown in this message's attached file).

When I rotate the headset's volume control to the max, it emits an audible beep.

However, when I play a video or music file on the MBP, no audio comes through the headset regardless of the headset's volume level and regardless of the MBP's volume level.

*Support:* The optical connection provides the best sound quality as well as Dolby Digital surround sound. You should use the optical connection for all consoles and computers that have an optical audio output. The optical port is a small door with a red light inside. In addition to Optical, it might also be labeled Optical for S/PDIF, TOSLINK, or Digital.

If your console does not have an optical audio port and you connect your console to your TV using an HDMI cable, then you can take digital audio out of most TVs' optical connection and Dolby Digital surround sound will be supported.

If you do not have an optical output on your console, TV, or computer, then you should use USB, which provides high quality digital audio and Dolby Headphone and Dolby Pro Logic IIx surround sound. If your system has neither optical nor USB outputs, then use the analog connection.

I was still stuck after receiving the above reply. My followup posting in the ticketing system went unanswered for nine days. My followup to the followup elicited a prompt and apologetic reply from "The QA Team" asking what software

I was using. Nine days after answering that question (iTunes for OS X), I followed up again. The same-day reply finally gave the required answer.

Sorry for the delay. So if we understand correctly, you can't hear any audio coming out of the H-Wireless on your MacBook correct? If that's the case, please do the following to setup the H-Wireless properly.

...make sure that your H-Wireless headset is paired up to the H-Wireless base. After you've done that, open System Preferences and click on Sound. On the Output section, select SteelSeries H-Wireless and do the same for the Input section. Adjust the volume on both your Mac and on the H-Wireless and you should be able to hear sound through the headset.

The only place where I could find this information was buried in an online [FAQ](#) rather than in the user guide.

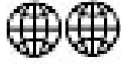
The above experiences gave me the impression that the H Wireless Headset's printed user guide and online instructions were intended for experienced users rather than novices needing a modicum of handholding, and that iDevice users were not expected to use this product.

What was the H Wireless Headset's audio quality after properly setting it up to work wirelessly with my computer? Surprisingly, it was about as good as my less expensive, far more convenient (despite being wired), and high-quality sounding (despite being Dolby-less) go-to [in-ear-headphones](#).

One more thing...the H Wireless Headset can be used with iDevices in wired mode using the included "mobile" cable. What was this product's audio quality under this condition? Surprisingly disappointing—the overall sound was muddy to my ears, especially compared to my go-to in-ear-headphones. Note that the H Wireless Headset lacks a remote for controlling your music tracks; instead, you need to use your portable music device's controls. Very inconvenient and time-consuming.

In summary, the H Wireless Headset is marketed as a "premium multi-platform wireless gaming headset...for use with virtually all media and gaming systems," and that [might be true](#) for tech-savvy gamers using a Playstation, Xbox, or Windows PC. This product's price tag (MSRP \$299.99) almost certainly warrants the buzz-word "premium," but the price in time that novices could pay getting up to speed or the audio quality that mobile device users could experience almost

certainly does not. Let's hope that SteelSeries improves their printed user guide and upgrades the H Wireless Headset so that it "just works" wirelessly with iDevices and Android mobile devices out of the box.



Review contributed by: Barry Fass-Holmes