



Terra LS.32 LuminSound System

By Dennis Burger August 6, 2012

I've never really taken a stab at reviewing outdoor audio, partly because I live in Alabama and venture out of doors as infrequently as possible, and partly because—being the science geek that I am, compounded by my ignorance of outdoor audio—I always figured an all-weather speaker review from me would probably read something like this: “This product appears to be an adakitelike porphyry with origins around a continental collision zone. Given that it’s actually made of plastic, geochemical and isotopic analysis is impossible, so that’s just a working hypothesis. It does make music, though, so that’s nice. [Insert boilerplate].”

Plus, I've never really been keen on the idea of drilling holes in my house.

But when Terra came knocking, offering its new LS.32 LuminSound Outdoor LED & Lighting System for review, I jumped in the car and immediately bought a masonry drill bit set. I figured, if I'm going to lose my outdoor audio virginity, it ought to be with something special like this.

At the heart of the system is Terra's new sleek, cylindrical black bollard with built-in 270-lumen LED lighting and rotatable two-way speaker system, which is designed to spike into the ground or mount on a variety of surfaces. On its own, the bollard is capable



At the heart of Terra's LS.32 LuminSound Outdoor LED & Lighting System is a sleek, cylindrical black bollard with built-in 270-lumen LED lighting and rotatable two-way speaker system, which is designed to spike into the ground or mount on a variety of surfaces. It is available in black, copper, and silver.

On its own, the bollard is capable

of cranking down to an impressive 65 Hz, which is much deeper bass than I'm used to hearing from outdoor audio systems, but to make sure I got the full experience, Terra also sent along one of its AC.SUBe weatherproof partially buried subwoofing monsters, which drops the bass extension of the system as a whole down to an impressive-anywhere 26 Hz, when properly, partially buried.

Rounding out the review system that Terra provided is a Crown CDi 1000 power amplifier, which is an optional component of the company's recommended system (much more on that in a moment), along with a weatherproof power supply for the LED lights. Before we get to the Crown amp, it's worth mentioning that each of the LED power supplies include two leads that can power up to 18 lights. The lights in the bollard can be configured at the factory as down-firing, up-firing, or both. Terra sent me one down-firing, and one with both up- and down-firing LEDs. I wired the power supply to operate the downfiring lights since that's what I ended up greatly preferring in practice. The up-firing configuration would be better for lighting the front of a house itself, which doesn't really interest me in the backyard. The down-firing configuration illuminates the yard nicely, and extends my playtime with Bruno—my bully mix—way after sundown.

Thankfully, I already had a mains outlet on the patio that's controllable with a light switch, although, I plan on bringing the power supply inside at some point soon and running it off of a Z-Wave power outlet connected to my lighting control system. All of that is merely to emphasize that power and control of the lighting element of the bollard is separate from the audio side of things.

And that's where the Crown CDi 1000 comes in. If you're familiar with the amp, this will come as no surprise to you, but as a complete outdoor audio newb, I was a little perplexed by the phoenix-style inputs, which are designed for a balanced input signal. Thankfully my Anthem D2v does have balanced second-zone audio outputs, so I only needed to mangle one end of an XLR cable to get the system up and running. Also thankfully, the instruction manual includes a wiring diagram detailing how to jury-rig the connection if you only have an unbalanced source at your disposal.

Those of you who are familiar with the Crown CDi 1000 may be thinking to yourself, "Hang on, now, that amp is only two-channel, and you've got a passive sub and two speakers on your hands there." And you'd be right. In this configuration, you power the sub with one channel and run the bollards in mono. Because, let's face it: when you're sitting outside digging on some background tunes, how often do you find yourself sitting still in the sweet spot analyzing the channel separation and depth of the aural soundstage? I'm guessing exactly zero times out of a hundred. For this setup, mono works wonderfully, and the bollard includes a built-in 70-volt transformer for simple multi-bollard installs

And if I'm being honest, I didn't expect much out of the sound to begin with. "Barely acceptable" audio quality would have been absolute gravy, given how different this system is, how gorgeous it is, how truly unlike anything else I've seen on the market. The fact that it sounds really fantastic is a bit of a minor miracle in my book. Another big plus

is that you can swivel the speakers nearly 360 degrees to optimize the sound for different crowds or activities. It's not an effortless swivel—you have to put a bit of elbow grease into it—but I'd honestly be a little worried if it were much easier. The system as a whole feels rock solid and built to last.

I didn't know beforehand quite how much I would use an outdoor audio system, given my locale and the fact that it's comfortable outside for roughly three days out of the year. As much of a job as it was to install the LS.32 LuminSound outdoor LED and lighting system, though (seriously, I hope this is the last time I ever have to bury runs of PVC piping for a review), I have to say, I can't imagine living without it now. We had a nice afternoon thunderstorm roll through yesterday, which made outdoor temps bearable for about an hour at sunset, so my wife and I dined outside at one of our favorite restaurants, and I found myself wishing they had a few LS.32's scattered around. So you might also find this system to be an excellent foot in the door for some light commercial work if you're looking to take your company in that direction.



To add to the review of its LS.32 LuminSound system, Terra also sent along one of its AC.SUBe weatherproof partially buried subwoofers.

Even if you're only in the residential market, though, it's hard to deny the value of the LuminSound system, if only for the fact that there really isn't anything else on the market quite like it. Sure, there may be kitschy DIY outdoor lights with crappy speakers built in, but high-quality custom landscape lighting with genuinely great audio (and oodles of bass to boot)? It's safe to say that Terra doesn't have a lot of genuine competition on its hands just yet, so it's nice to see that they got it really right on their first try. Don't be surprised if the market is flooded with imitators soon, though.

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Kudos

Terra's LS.32 LuminSound Outdoor LED & Lighting System is a rare find in today's market: a unique product that sounds great, functions beautifully, is built to last, and offers something that massretail products simply can't.

Concerns

Installation was a little daunting, but only if you're an outdoor audio newbie.

Product Specs

- Grille color options: black, copper, and silver
- Bass/Mid Driver: 5.25-inch Terra-built weatherproof cast frame aluminum ceramic anodized cone w/MFCS spiderless fluid suspension, rubber surround tweeter: 0.75-inch (coaxial) aluminum dome, neodymium motor, fluidcooled co-axial tweeter
- Frequency response: 65 Hz to 20 KHz +/-3dB (w/ AC.Sub 26 Hz to 20 KHz +/- 3dB)
- Impedance: 4, 8, 16, 32 watts or 8 ohms
- Power handling: 25 to 150 watts undistorted power
- Sensitivity: 89 dB (1 watt @1 meter)

What's a Bollard?

Prior to the lighting industry's appropriation of the word "bollard" to describe short, post-like light fixtures, it originally described a post used on a ship or a wharf for mooring. The word also describes a variety of structures to control or direct road traffic, such as posts arranged in a line to obstruct the passage of motor vehicles.