

The SportEAR Custom Edge 30

- ear protection at its finest

by Con Kapralos



The pair of Custom Edge 30 hearing plugs tailored to the acoustic profile of Con Kapralos. Color coded - blue for the left ear, red for the right - the volume control knob, sound port and nylon 'handle' for removing them are clearly visible.



The Custom Edge 30 hearing protector installed in the ear. Once fitted, you hardly notice you are wearing them.

We are blessed with having only one set of ears and it's probably an extremely wise decision in this day and age that we protect them from damage caused by exposure to loud noise, be it repetitive or spontaneous.

Having had a father who worked in a wool processing mill for more than 30 years, personal protective equipment (PPE) in his early days was very minimal to be precise and many workers back then never used any ear protection. That long-term exposure to loud noise led to hearing loss and all the frustrations of trying to communicate with someone who can't hear you.

Being involved in the shooting sports from my teens, I too have to admit that hearing protection was something I took for granted, until one spotlighting session where the discharge of a .270 Winchester set my eardrums ringing. From that day, I have subscribed to the rule that any ear protection is better than none and over the years, I have bought the best in hearing protection I could afford. This has included foam plugs, passive and electronic earmuffs, silicon-moulded plugs and a few more. All these have been highly serviceable.

However, I am always looking for the next step in hearing protection.

At the SSAA SHOT Expo in Melbourne earlier this year, I was perusing the Beretta Australia trade display when senior product manager Clemente Scribani Rossi introduced me to Ray Bori, from SportEAR in the United States. The firm is a leader in the hearing protection business and I have been fortunate to have reviewed for the SSAA readers several of its excellent products. Clemente and Ray showed me one of the premium products - the SportEAR Custom Edge 30, a custom-made, ear-moulded hearing device, which is basically a personal hearing aid that suppresses noise above the 85 decibel (dB) threshold and also enhances background noise up to 30dB. For recreational shooters and serious hunters, filtering out damaging gun report noise while being able to hear range commands or background noise out in the field is a huge advantage. They are so small and compact you will hardly notice you are wearing them.

However, the only condition for me to review the Custom Edge 30 was I had to have a pair made up for me, which involved a hearing test and answering a

few questions from Ray. I decided then and there it was time to invest in the best for my hearing protection.

A brief background

SportEAR has its roots in three generations of audiologists from the Utah region of the US. Having several family members who are keen hunters would naturally inspire them to look at hearing protection while out shooting. The nature of the company's core business was manufacturing hearing aids for improvement in quality of life, but being avid hunters as well as having business partners who are heavily involved in the hunting industry, hearing protection specifically for recreational shooting was intently looked into.

The original sound enhancement device, called the 'Simply Clear', is basically a medical hearing device, which was converted into the SportEAR Custom Edge, utilising the same electro-medical componentry found in the Simply Clear and later the SportEAR Ghost Stryke hearing protection system. The Custom Edge has four different models, some completely fabricated to sit within the ear canal (and cost several thousand dollars per ear) to

the Custom Edge 30, an earplug moulded specifically to the user's ear profile and tuned to their audiology profile. The Custom Edge 30 retails for about \$1400, but in reality, it is cheap insurance for your hearing's sake.

The Custom Edge 30 process

Ray Bori, from SportEAR, went into detail outlining the nature of the human ear and the way that the ear picks up noise and converts it into a signal for the brain. Without moving into aural pathology, once your hearing is damaged, it can't be repaired. When the lesson was complete, Ray then conducted a comprehensive hearing test, which took around 15 minutes. This test gauges the user's level of hearing (and level of hearing impairment), which in turn is used to manufacture the Custom Edge 30 to suit the precise requirements of the user.

Once the hearing test was conducted, Ray then took silicon moulds of both ear canals and outer ears, which would be used to fabricate the hard plastic shell for the Custom Edge 30. The shell would naturally be a perfect fit in each ear and also house all the necessary electronic circuitry for the optimal aural output as required. The only minus point was that the Custom Edge 30 units are made in the US, with the turnaround time being about four to six weeks from when the mould is taken. However, from what I was told by Beretta Australia, SportEAR had quite a few orders for the Custom Edge 30, including from current SSAA President Geoff Jones.

The Custom Edge 30 up close

Upon receiving the Custom Edge 30 several weeks after the initial consultation, the product was eagerly inspected. Arriving in a sturdy padded cardboard box with an individual storage pouch, the hearing protectors were in red and blue colors, with the red being for the right ear and the blue one for the left ear. The electronic circuitry was neatly contained in the hard shell of the plug, with the volume control dial and battery compartment easily accessible from the outer end, which I chose to be bright orange in color.

The hearing protectors utilise normal hearing aid batteries and a pack of six batteries were supplied with the units. Each ear unit takes one battery and this provides seven to 10 days of operation. However, SportEAR does specify that the batteries be removed from each hearing protector when not in use. This is really straightforward to do, with instructions provided in the user manual. The hearing



A standard hearing aid-type battery is easy to replace and is securely housed in the body of the ear protector. SportEAR does recommend that batteries be removed from the units when not in frequent use.

protectors are simple to insert in each ear and to remove them, a small nylon 'handle' (akin to fishing line) makes it easy to grip and pull the protector outwards.

The volume control is a small dial on each unit, which turns from 'off' to a maximum amplification of background noise and maximum noise suppression, as per the audiology profile created to suit the user. One neat thing with the Custom Edge 30s is that no-one else can use them as they will only fit the intended client and being a unit confined to the ear canal and outer ear, you don't experience the dreaded 'earmuff perspiration' - one of my pet hates when using earmuff-style hearing protection.

On test

The Custom Edge 30 hearing protectors have been with me for several months now and I have found them worth every penny. Not only do they provide excellent functioning when at the range, suppressing even the noisiest report from muzzle-braked rifles, they allow me to hear precise commands from the range officer and make having conversations with range users a formality.



Ray Bori, from SportEAR, takes a silicon mould of Con Kapralos' ear canal as part of the Custom Edge 30 process.

The amplification of background noise is truly appreciated when out hunting. Doing a lot of stalking on foot, the advantage of having 'bionic ears' really comes as a huge advantage, being able to pick up surrounding noises in your immediate vicinity - be it your quarry nearby or your hunting buddy whispering to you on the UHF radio. The difference you perceive when you have them on and working for you and when you don't is astounding.

While I still have back-up plugs and earmuff protectors, the Custom Edge 30 is the best investment I have made in my shooting and hunting equipment for some time. As mentioned previously, they are not cheap at around \$1400 for a set, but considering modern 'in-ear' hearing aids cost around \$3000 per side (a fact I confirmed talking to my brother-in-law who uses such), the Custom Edge 30 works out as a wise purchase for the shooter or hunter who values their hearing and quality of life.

For more information on SportEAR hearing protectors or to enquire about an initial consultation and fitting, contact Beretta Australia on 03 9799 5100 or via berettaaustralia.com.au ●

Specifications

Model	Custom 30	Custom 60	Custom 90	Custom 360
Volume Enhancement	30dB	36dB	48dB	48dB
Customisable Channels	1	1	4	4
Programmable and Repeatable	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Background Noise Reduction	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Wind Reduction	No	No	Yes	Yes
Designed for Extended Daily Use	No	No	No	Yes
RRP	\$1399	\$1799	\$2799	\$3499