

Silent Alpaca Switch Review

-ThereminGoat, 2/15/2020

Switch Background

Releasing in January of 2020 directly onto PrimeKB's website, sans interest check, the Silent Alpaca switches became the first commercially sold Durock silent linear switch. Being first to market, these silent linear switches beat out the other designs for Durock silent linears, which as of this writing, are Gerge V's (of Optic Boards) Silent Linears and Zambumon's Serikos switches, which are currently in Interest Check phase and production phase, respectively. Keeping with the SA Bliss theme that inspired PrimeKB's flagship switch line, the Silent Alpacas released with the same light-pink stem enigmatic of the linear Alpacas, but a smoky black, translucent housing rather than the solid opaque grey of the Alpaca switches. As of the writing of this review, these switches are still stocked at PrimeKB and have no plans of changing – in style or color scheme – so long as the market is there for them, according to a conversation I've had with HoltenC.

With quite recent concerns over actual housing material of the switches being sold, it is worth mentioning that the Silent Alpaca switches supposedly feature the same housing composition as the normal Alpaca switches – a polycarbonate top and a nylon bottom. While I have no personal ability to verify the veracity of this marketing, several people in the community are beginning to explore options to test the composition of the Alpaca switch housings, as well as other controversial claims about material composition in other switch housings. To date, and to my knowledge as well, no rigorous scientific proof verifying that the top and bottom housings are of a different material for the Silent Alpacas or any other switch. (While a good estimate as to if there is a *difference*, with no other ability to conclude past that guess, I personally don't condone torching your switches out of curiosity.)

As a final background note to the Silent Alpacas, I have been lucky enough to receive the samples that Durock sent both HoltenC and George V directly as part of their initial inquiry into starting a sale of silent linear switches. While not commercially available, I will still use these pieces in comparisons later in this review as I feel they are different enough to provide some insight into how these switches were developed. As can be seen in the picture, below, the HoltenC sample (left) features an all clear housing with a white, silent linear stem whereas George V's sample (right) features the same clear housing though with a Silent Alpaca stem. Based on this, as well as the conversations that I had with both of them, this is likely due to HoltenC being the first vendor to request a silent linear sample whereas George V's request came during the production of the first Silent Alpaca shipment.

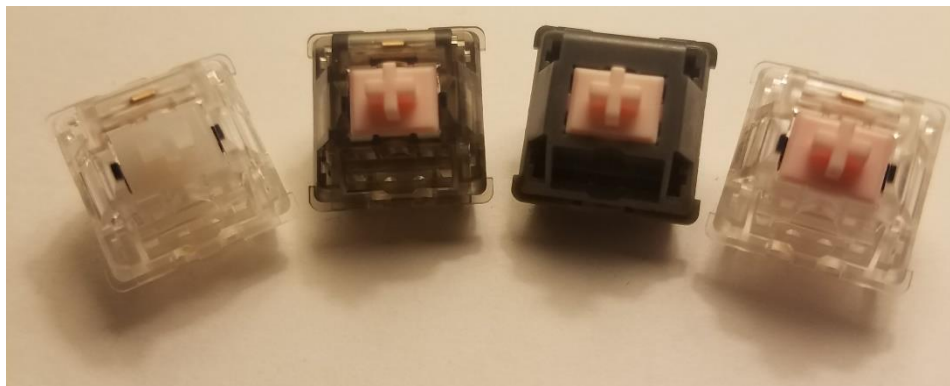


Figure 1: Alpaca Family Tree (Left to Right: HoltenC Silent Sample, Silent Alpaca, Alpaca, George V Sample)

Silent Alpaca Switch Performance

The Silent Alpaca switches are, by and large, a fantastic switch option, both by Durock's unwritten standards as well as the compared to the market at large. In addition to the aforementioned two material, translucent housing and similar pink stem to the normal Alpaca switches, these too feature a light factory lubrication on the stems and rails that is a large component of these switches' feel. As having stated prior in Equalz C³ Tangerine V2 switch review, it appears as if this quality of lube application is becoming a trademark of Durock and JWK pieces across the board.

Appearance:

While I've already mentioned a couple of times in this review about the appearance of the Silent Alpaca switches, there are a couple of things still worth mentioning about them. First of all, to provide a little bit of comparison, the housings are most similarly colored to Gateron Ink housings while the stems are closest to a Sakurios switch from Zeal. Secondly, when viewed directly from a top-down perspective, it is possible to see the top of the silencing pads on the stem through the top housing. When viewed from the side, it becomes quite clear that the silencing pads on the light-pink stem are a dark black and stick out from the tops and bottoms of the slide rails on the stem. Finally, and to help lend some credence to the idea that the housing material of these pieces is certainly different between the top and bottom housings, when viewed under a bright light, there is a difference in the shine of the light on the housings. While the top housing, made of polycarbonate appears smooth and glossy, the bottom housing, which is made of nylon, appears to have a slight grain to it and produces more of a diffuse reflectance. Unfortunately, I was not able to capture this phenomenon on camera due to the poor quality of the (cellphone) camera that I use for these reviews at the current moment.

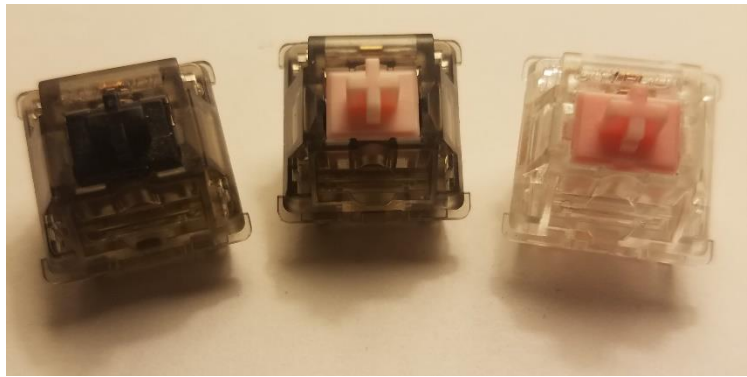


Figure 2: Silent Alpaca comparison to Gateron Inks and Zeal Sakurios switches.

Push Feel:

Overall, the Silent Alpaca switches certainly have a feeling to them on par with the initial expectations I had for them. Most noticeably, the stroke of each switch is smooth and consistent, and features no pre-travel nor changes in spring weight toward the tops or bottoms of the travel. As well, the great factory-applied lube cuts out virtually all scratchiness, leaving only a negligible amount. However, unlike the other Durock/JWK linears that have been sold with factory lube to date, these switches feel consistently 'light' on the lube, and don't quite nearly hit the same general smoothness as some of the other popular releases. While I'm not entirely sure why this is, I am willing to chalk this up to the fact that my pieces were likely from the first batches produced of silent linears at Durock, as I bought mine very soon after the sales page went up, and that they are still fine-tuning their production of them. (I certainly will be curious to see how the lubrication stacks up to Serikos, which are currently under production at the time of this writing.)

Sound:

I'm going to be entirely honest, I contemplated deleting this section altogether purely because of the fact that it is a *Silent* Alpaca and, in theory, shouldn't have any sound for me to review at all. However, as previously stated, I am simply trying to stretch my word count to roll in the nonexistent money. Under normal operation these switches are pretty damn quiet, but given the light lube job mentioned above, there is some amount of a sound that can be heard with these switches. As well, I don't personally feel that the silencing pads do well for bottoming out at high rates of actuation, as there is an

increase in noise produced from bottom out the faster the pieces are activated. Overall, though, these are certainly quieter than the normal Alpaca pieces.

Wobble:

The wobble on the Silent Alpaca switches is honestly one of the most surprisingly impressive aspects of these switches. While there is a tiny bit of E/W wobble direction, there is almost no N/S wobble at all. In fact, without having compared these to any other switches initially, I was impressed by simply how little wobble there was in the N/S direction.

Other:

I will be the first to admit that I am not much of a silent linear person, and simply by market volume it doesn't appear that many people are, either. That being said, though, I am certainly impressed with how these pieces turned out and maybe given a reduced price point from their current \$0.70 per piece price, I'd consider making a build with these. With the Ohio Mechanical Keyboard meetup less than a month away, though, I know I will be getting a chance to try these in a full build as u/Ophidios has planned to build his V4N4G4O4N board with them. Maybe it will turn me into a full-on believer?



Figure 3: I mean seriously, how the fuck am I supposed to remember how to spell that? (Picture from factoryofidols)

Comparison Notes to Other Notable Silent Linear Switches:

Note – These are not aimed at being comprehensive comparisons between all factors of these switches as this would simply be too long for this writeup. These are little notes of interest I generated when comparing these pieces to Silent Alpacas side by side.

HoltenC Durock Silent Linear Sample:

- There is significantly more N/S and E/W wobble in these samples. Based on this sample, alone I'm very pleased with the changes that were made prior to production of these pieces.
- The sound is slightly different and based on that as well as the feel I can guess that Durock was and is still continuing to work on the best lubing for their silent linear pieces.

George V Durock Silent Linear Sample:

- Like from the previous comparison, the sound is distinctly different on all three of the pieces and it supports the idea that they're still working on lubrication.
- The same wobble that I had noticed is also still there like in the previous sample, and thus it can be inferred that changes to the top housing molds prior to production in order to produce that insanely reduced N/S wobble.

Gateron Silent Ink V1:

- There is *significantly* more wobble in both N/S and E/W direction as compared to Silent Alpacas.
- As compared to the bottoming out sound of the Silent Alpacas, the bottoming out on these pieces is much more solid and muted. I'm near certain that this is due to the fact that the rubber dampening pads on the Silent Ink stems have a bigger footprint than the Silent Alpaca stems.
- Overall feel wise, though, these are quite comparable to the Silent Alpaca switches.

Gateron Silent Black:

- These have a significant amount of scratch as compared to all of the other silent linear switch options mentioned above this one.
- These have a comparable amount of N/S wobble to the Gateron Silent Ink switches.
- Even with a milky bottom housing, which is often considered to help improve the sound of Gateron switches and are frequently used in frankenswitch designs, the overall sound of this switch is quite scratchy and loud.

TTC Silent Pink:

- Since TTC is a brand that existed prior to the concept of lubrication, it's no surprise that this piece has the largest amount of scratch both in feel and in sound as compared to the other switches on this list.
- Interestingly, the actual size of the stem in terms of top-down view is much closer to the size of the stem of the Silent Alpacas than the Gateron branded stems.
- The spring quality on the TTC Silent Pinks is pretty bad as well – definitely would not recommend.

Outemu Sky Silent Linears:

- Unlike the other switches on this list, the Outemu Sky line does not come pre-assembled and thus it is kind of hard to compare the 'out of the box feel'.
- Even unlubed, these switches have a lot less scratch than the Gateron Silent Black switches and given a proper amount of lubrication, I'm certain that these switches can be on par with the Silent Alpaca switches in terms of feel.

Healios:

- Much 'tackier' bottoming out sound than the Silent Alpaca switches.
- Comparable E/W wobble but a much higher N/S wobble than the Silent Alpaca linears. If I had to compare the pieces from this list to, the Healios have a comparable N/S wobble to the Gateron Ink switch.
- While it may be marginal at best, I feel like stock Healios do have a bit of scratch that comes through in the feel as compared to the Silent Alpacas.

Final Conclusions:

Buy 'em. I mean, you're not spending my money so I'm perfectly fine seeing you spend yours. But in a much more objective light, these are certainly a very refreshing entry into the switch market as there are not currently many solid silent linear options that are around. (I mean for fucks sake I have a TTC Silent Pink in my comparison section.) I think that if you are even remotely interested in a silent linear switch that the Silent Alpacas will prove to be an interesting route of exploration for you though how well they will stand up to future competition from other Durock/JWK silent linears has yet to be determined.

Further Reading:

PrimeKB Silent Alpaca / Alpaca Switch Sales Page:

Link: <https://www.primekb.com/products/alpaca-linears>

Wayback: <https://web.archive.org/save/https://www.primekb.com/products/alpaca-linears>

VicareyG (George V) Durock Silent Linear IC #1 Geekhack:

Link: <https://geekhack.org/index.php?topic=103905.0>

Wayback: <https://web.archive.org/save/https://geekhack.org/index.php?topic=103905.0>

Zambumon Seriko's Page:

Link: <https://zambumon.com/portfolio/seriko/>

Wayback: <https://web.archive.org/save/https://zambumon.com/portfolio/seriko/>

Cijanzen's Silent Alpaca Keebtalk Review:

Link: <https://www.keebtalk.com/t/silent-linear-switches-comparison-silent-alpaca-review/8055>

Wayback: <https://web.archive.org/save/https://www.keebtalk.com/t/silent-linear-switches-comparison-silent-alpaca-review/8055>

VicareyG Silent Linear Typing Test:

Link: <https://soundcloud.com/user-981972463-667161549/sets/durock-silent-linear-typing-test>

Wayback: <https://web.archive.org/save/https://soundcloud.com/user-981972463-667161549/sets/durock-silent-linear-typing-test>

u/HoltenC Silent Alpaca Reddit Announcement:

Link: https://www.reddit.com/r/MechanicalKeyboards/comments/edmltu/silent_alpacas_coming_january/

Wayback:

https://web.archive.org/save/https://www.reddit.com/r/MechanicalKeyboards/comments/edmltu/silent_alpacas_coming_january/

TehTechnoGuy's NK65 with Durock Silent Alpaca Typing Test:

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-DFni4jUoE>