SM Pro Audio M-Patch 2 £100

SM Pro Audio believe quality monitor control needn't break the bank. Greg Scarth contemplates...

WHAT IS IT?

Passive monitor controller and headphone amp

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HIGHLIGHTS

1 Monitor controller with passive signal path 2 Input/output selection mute and mono controls 3 Built-in headphone amp

Headphone amp frequency response: 20 Hz – 20 kHz $(\pm 0.5 dB)$

Dimensions: 220 x 120 x 86mm Weight: 1 kg

onitor control is one of the simplest but most important aspects of any studio setup. Not only

does a hardware monitor controller protect you from any nasty surprises if the digitally controlled output of your audio interface plays up, but hands-on control of monitoring levels, mono summing and speaker selection can seriously improve workflow. I was very keen to take a closer look at the M-Patch 2, a simple monitor controller with a passive signal path and an enticingly low price.

The M-Patch 2 has already been a hit in mainland Europe, America and SM Pro Audio's native Australia, but can it conquer the UK?

Sounding out

The M-Patch's somewhat utilitarian case offers a variety of connection options which should suit most needs. Main input is by balanced TRS or 1/4"

jack connection, while an auxiliary input can be connected via the RCA input. For monitoring, the two pairs of stereo output connections are via XLR only while the front panel houses a single 1/4" stereo headphone socket. Rackmount ears are provided which offer a neat solution if you have a spare 2U rack space near your monitoring position or can double up as a crude stand for flat or angled mounting.

The feature set is surprisingly complete for a product at this price. The front panel houses the main rotary volume control along with separate controls for the aux input trim and headphone output level, plus dedicated switches for input and output selection and mute. Mono summing is activated using a toggle switch next to the main volume control, providing a quick and easy way of checking for phase anomalies. Small LFDs provide visual indicators of the selected inputs and outputs along with activation of the mono and mute settings.

Plug and play

In use, everything is straightforward. The main volume control knob feels solid and makes it easy to dial in a suitable level. As far as sound quality

kept to a bare minimum. My only criticism is that the potentiometer doesn't track perfectly at lower volume settings, but this is less a design flaw and more an inherent problem with the technology. The best solution would be a stepped attenuator, which would also be even less coloured, but that would increase the price significantly. In practice, it's not so much of a problem as long as you have your monitors' volume controls set appropriately.

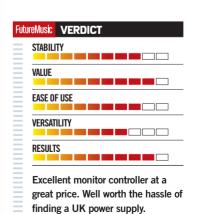
It's worth noting that the M-Patch's attenuation, switching and summing circuitry is truly passive and runs without the use of a power supply, but the on-board headphone amp and indicator LEDs require a 12-16 volt wall wart-style DC power supply. The M-Patch is currently only supplied with a European two-pin plug, meaning that you'll need a plug adapter or a universal PSU to get up and running, SM Pro informed us that they hope to supply UK-ready adapters in the near future, while some UK retailers are already throwing adapters in with the package to sweeten the deal.

Once that minor hitch is out of the way, the M-Patch's active features do the job with a minimum of fuss. The headphone amp is acceptable for a unit in this price range, offering a maximum power output of 320mW into a 32 load with reasonable if unspectacular sound quality.

Conclusion

At this price, the M-Patch 2 is an extremely attractive solution for monitor control. I'd certainly rate it above competition like the Samson C-Control and slightly cheaper Behringer MiniMon. I suspect the M-Patch will be suited to most home studios, and would suggest that it be considered alongside even more expensive rivals such as the Mackie Big Knob and TC Electronic BMC-2. Worth a look by everyone on the hunt for monitor control. FM





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