

Olympus LS-20M & LS-3

£299 & £179

Record and video your gigs with minimal hassle thanks to this latest pair from Olympus *by Trevor Curwen*

Okay, so you play guitar, and perhaps you're also in a band. You'll maybe want to get the word about that band out to the wider world and there have never been more ways to do that than with via today's various social media outlets. At one time, audio 'demo' recordings would have sufficed, but with the rise of YouTube it's all about getting seen as well as heard, so a decent quality video recorder may well become yet another item on a musician's wants list alongside the ever-useful pocket-sized stereo recorder.

Two pieces of gear to carry? Wouldn't it be a better use of resources if you could buy a pocket-sized stereo recorder that could also capture full 1920 x 1080 pixel HD video? Well, you can: it's called the Olympus LS-20M and we have one here to take a look at alongside its smaller sibling the LS-3, which doesn't do video, but will give you a useful stereo recording facility wherever you happen to be.

LS-20M

The LS-20M is not tiny, but it is just the right size to be held snugly in the palm and certainly slim enough to slip into a shirt pocket. If you don't want to hold the LS-20M or leave it on a flat surface, you can use the standard tripod mount on the unit's rear. Power requirements are met by a rechargeable lithium battery that takes its charge from a USB socket, so you can charge it directly from your computer or from the supplied mains adaptor. A full charge will give you up to four hours of stereo audio recording or up to 1 hour and 20 minutes of video recording.

Once power has been switched on, the LS-20M can operate in audio or video (Voice or Movie) mode, as selected by a small switch on the side of its body. Sound is recorded to removable media in the form of an SD card via an inbuilt stereo microphone array that can be pointed at the sound source, but there's also an input for plugging in an external mic.

Several folders are available into which to record your audio files and there's also a 'Music' folder for storing songs taken from your computer so you can use the LS-20M like an iPod. Wav files or mp3s can be recorded at a whole range of resolutions from 24-bit/96kHz down and in movie mode you can set the resolutions of the audio and video separately.

In movie mode with the LS-20M you simply point and shoot, the camera being on the front of the unit between the two microphones. The device sports a bright and clear LCD screen, approx 4 x 3cm, that lets you see exactly what you are recording and there's a useful 4x digital zoom for close-ups.

In Use

The LS-20M is a breeze to use with all the controls neatly laid out and not at all fiddly – turn it on, select voice or movie, press record and you are ready to go. Recording will commence with another press on the record button. All this takes a matter of

The Rivals

Olympus LS-20M

The main rival to the LS-20M would be **Zoom's Q3HD** (£249), which offers built-in mics in an X/Y pattern and can record full HD video as well as 24/96 audio. For recording lower resolution video and audio, **Alesis** has the **VideoTrack** (£100).

Olympus LS-3

There are loads of hand-held stereo recorders on the market, but a lot of them are bulkier than the LS-3. Some of the lighter, slim and compact models are the **Yamaha Pocketrak W24** (£208) and **C24** (£136), the **Tascam DR-08** (£209) and the **Zoom H1** (£99).

seconds, so if musical inspiration strikes, you can grab it and get recording before you forget. Setting the recording level on the fly is easy with the left and right arrows on the four-way cursor turning the level immediately up and down but you can also set it to auto.

Whether just recording acoustic guitar and vocals through the mics, or videoing a gig, the results were excellent – the sound is precise and clear while there are no worries

Setting up takes a matter of seconds, so if musical inspiration strikes, you can get recording before you forget



The LS-20M's clear LCD screen makes sure you keep up with the action



The LS-3 keeps things simple

about getting a sharp set of visuals, even in the low light conditions you might find at a gig. Transfer of the files to your computer over USB is quick and easily carried out, giving you web-ready media for upload.

LS-3

By contrast, the LS-3 is a much more compact proposition but, apart from the obvious lack of video recording, its audio operation closely resembles that of the LS-20M. A similar layout features microphones at the top corners and small playback speaker plus tripod mount at the rear, plus, in the place where the LS-20M had its camera, an extra omnidirectional microphone, which can be used in combination with the others if desired. This unit runs from a pair of rechargeable batteries but can also run from standard AAA batteries if you run out of charge. Sound is recorded to an internal 4GB memory and if you need more capacity, there's a slot to take microSD cards of up to 32GB.

In Use

Dead easy to set up and use, you can go from turning the LS-3 on to making a recording in under 15 seconds. While that's great for capturing any musical ideas that might pop into your head, perhaps even better – if you are noodling away on guitar and realise you have just played something brilliant – is a pre-recording function that enables the recorder to start recording up to two seconds before the recording button is pressed (it continually saves two seconds audio into memory when the function is active). If you're not

recording everything anyway, this might just catch something you would otherwise have missed and is good if a band start playing a song before you can get your finger to the record button – no more missed starts. We have no issues with sound quality and although small, the mics do a great job – particularly when the third mic is switched in allowing a fuller bass end to be recorded.

Verdict

We've stressed many times the usefulness of slipping a portable stereo recorder into your pocket or gigbag for capturing song ideas on the fly and recording gigs and practice sessions – and there are certainly plenty out there to choose from. If ease of use, really compact sizing and low weight is high on your list then you should definitely consider the LS-3.

The LS-20M is something else again. By giving you high-quality video as well as audio recording capability it is definitely an object of desire. Of course, it costs more than most portable stereo recorders but we think that that extra outlay is justified in that you'll always be able to archive your music both in audio and visually – the LS-20M is an ideal travelling companion for any band. **G**

The Bottom Line

Olympus LS-20M

We like: Quality audio and video recording in one unit; ease of use; compact size
We dislike: Longer battery life would be useful

Guitarist says: Portable audio and video recording ably taken care of with a single device that can slip into your pocket

Olympus LS-3

We like: Compact size; ease of use; internal memory

We dislike: Not a lot
Guitarist says: Compact and bijou audio recorder. It looks cute, but it still does the business



Olympus LS-20M

PRICE: £299

ORIGIN: Indonesia

TYPE: Linear PCM recorder

RECORDING MEDIA: SD card (1Gb-32Gb)

SIMULTANEOUS RECORDING

TRACKS: Two (stereo)

AUDIO RECORDING FILE FORMAT:

Wav, mp3

MAXIMUM STEREO RECORDING

TIME (2Gb card): 55min (24/96),

three hours (16/44.1), 31 hours

(mp3@128kbps)

PCM RECORDING DATA FORMAT:

16/24-bit, 44.1/48/88.2/96 kHz

MOVIE RESOLUTION: HD1080p

30fps, HD720p 30fps, HD480p 30fps,

MOVIE ZOOM: Digital 4x

CONNECTIONS: 3.5mm mini jack

stereo mic input, 3.5mm mini jack

stereo headphone output, USB

2.0, HDMI

POWER SUPPLY: Lithium ion

battery, USB-connecting AC

adaptor (supplied)

DIMENSIONS: 63 (w) x 135 (d)

x 18.1mm (h)

EXTRAS: Power adaptor, USB cable,

2GB SD card

SCV London

0208 418 1470

www.olympus.co.uk



Test results

Build quality ★★★★★
Features ★★★★★
Sound ★★★★★
Value for money ★★★★★

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Olympus LS-3

PRICE: £179

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Linear PCM recorder

RECORDING MEDIA: 4GB

NAND Flash memory, microSD card (-32Gb)

SIMULTANEOUS RECORDING

TRACKS: Two (stereo)

AUDIO RECORDING FILE FORMAT:

Wav, mp3, wma

MAXIMUM STEREO RECORDING

TIME (4Gb memory): 1hr 45min

(24/96), 5 hr 45min (16/44.1), 63 hr

30min (mp3@128kbps), 249 hr

(wma@32kbps)

PCM RECORDING DATA FORMAT:

16/24-bit, 44.1/48/88.2/96 kHz

CONNECTIONS: 3.5mm mini jack

stereo mic input, 3.5mm mini jack

stereo headphone output, USB

2.0, Remote

POWER SUPPLY: 2 x AAA battery

(LR03) or Olympus Ni-MH

rechargeable battery (supplied), USB-

connecting AC adaptor (not supplied)

DIMENSIONS: 39.8 (w) x 112 (d)

x 15.9mm (h)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 0.090/0.20

(including battery and SD card)

EXTRAS: USB cable, Micro SD card,

strap, windshield, soft carrying case,

Olympus Sonority software

Test results

Build quality ★★★★★
Features ★★★★★
Sound ★★★★★
Value for money ★★★★★

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★