



Samson Airline 77 UHF wireless system £229



The first to offer the freedom of belt pack-less performance, Samson's Airline wireless system now features a revised true diversity receiver and a reduced asking price by Paul Day

Samson officially introduced the Airline wireless system late in 2001, although this pioneering product had debuted almost two years earlier, with production problems and delivery delays keeping UK customers impatiently waiting. Around four years on, with such setbacks firmly in the past and the series well established, the company has decided to make a few minor changes and, more importantly, significantly reduce retail prices. These savings have been made possible by switching the manufacture of some key components from Japan to China, but there's no obvious drop in quality and everything is impressively packaged in a foam padded, plastic carrying case, including a connecting cable and mains power supply.

It may have been on the market for over four years, but this Samson system still faces few direct competitors. Most wireless systems employ a transmitter connected to the instrument via a short cable and mounted on the player's strap or belt. The Airline approach incorporates everything into an ultra-compact, lightweight transmitter that plugs straight into the instrument's output jack. This super-small solution is



The squelch control eliminates carrier signal noise and RF interference

achieved courtesy of patented chips and special technology obviously still very much under Samson control.

The self-contained concept encompasses a pair of player-friendly systems, each comprising one of two types of transmitter, plus an appropriate receiver, again offered in two versions. Usable radio frequencies →

SAMSON AIRLINE 77	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★
<p>■ WE LIKED Ease of use; the unit's overall performance</p> <p>■ WE DISLIKED Lack of any fixing facilities</p>	

The rivals

AKG WMS40	£139
The Scanner Pro SU161C	£199
Shure EUT14	£249

AKG is currently still the only company offering Samson any direct competition and the WMS40 system includes the GB40 Guitar Bug, which features a novel swivelling jack pin designed to fit all types of instrument. The Scanner Pro SU161C set-up uses a belt-pack transmitter linked to a receiver offering 16 user-selectable channels. Shure's EUT14 system employs the same conventional style components, combining the EUT1 body-pack transmitter and a EUT4A diversity receiver

PHOTOGRAPHY: KATHARINE LANE-SIMS



Above: the new jack pin design means it can now be inserted into a Tele-type jack cup



Right: the neat and tidy alternative to lead spaghetti



SAMSON AIRLINE AG1 TRANSMITTER

ORIGIN: Japan
CONTROLS: Power switch, 15dB pad switch, output level
INDICATORS: Power on/ low battery
ANTENNA: One wire-type, permanently attached
OPERATING FREQUENCIES: Four options

SAMSON AIRLINE CR77 RECEIVER

ORIGIN: China
CONTROLS: Volume, squelch level, power on, mic/line level switch
INDICATORS: Power on, peak, A/B receiver, RF level meter, Audio Input level meter
ANTENNA: Two rod-type, adjustable
OPERATING FREQUENCIES: Four options
CONNECTIONS: 12V DC input, unbalanced jack output, balanced XLR output
Sound Technology
 01462 480000
www.soundtech.co.uk

are limited to four choices in the UK and each system component carries an appropriate number confirming compatibility.

There have been very few actual design changes made since the Airline series was launched and the newly appended '77' suffix indicates the first major mod. This comes in the form of a new receiver, although even this doesn't differ that much from the original version.

AG1 Transmitter

Signal sending is handled by either the AG1 or AF1 transmitter, which differ only in the geometry of the integral jack plug pin. On the AG1 this is right-angled, for use with flat-mounted output sockets, while the AF1 features a sloping connector that mates neatly into a Strat-style, recessed jackplate.

The design of the AG1 has actually altered since its inception, with a thicker shank extension added before the jack pin meets the transmitter casing. This means the latter is no longer a flush fit against the instrument, but insertion into a Tele-type jack cup is now possible.

The transmitter's curvy plastic case measures a mere 8cm and adopts an ultra-unobtrusive profile in action, a theme maintained by the short, flexible aerial attached at the rear end. A red LED indicates battery condition, flashing once when the on switch is operated and staying on when power runs low. A single AAA battery, easily accessed via a slide-off cover, supplies suitable juice and a cheap, four-for-a-quad type lasts around four hours. Also in the battery compartment

is a trim pot governing overall signal level, while the side of the casing accommodates two small slide switches. One operates power on/off and the other engages a 15dB pad, necessary for use with instruments employing high-output pickups.

CR77 Receiver

The CR77 is a freestanding UHF True Diversity receiver that replaces the original UR1 version as the alternative to the stompbox-styled AP1. As before, it's encased in a one-unit, half-rack width, all-plastic box that still lacks grippy feet or any form of fixing method, such as a handle-securing clip on the underside. These omissions are important, because the lightweight construction looks far from robust and means the CR77 is easily knocked off any precarious perch.

Flanked by twin foldaway antennae, the front panel controls comprise output volume, squelch trim pot and a power on/off switch. Audio input and the incoming radio signal are monitored by separate six-segment meter ladders, while further LEDs indicate antennae operation, plus power and peak

The AG1 transmitter does its usual excellent, inconspicuous job, while its partner CR77 receiver displays no drop-out or pickup problems

status. Around the rear is the input for the supplied 12V DC wall wart, along with an XLR connector for balanced output operation, while a standard jack socket offers an unbalanced alternative. The two can be used simultaneously and a slide switch selects the relevant respective mic or line levels.

The user manual gives a rundown on the features of all components in the various systems, but the 'Setting Up' section refers to the AP1 receiver only,

making no mention of the CR77 and how to establish its various settings, etc. Fortunately, this process is pretty much intuitive once the various functions are understood, but to omit any explanation is somewhat strange.

IN USE: The various levels have to be set to achieve an optimum match between the instrument, system and amplification. The process involved requires a degree of trial-and-error, but with ample adjustment available the task is easily accomplished.

The aural results are more than worth any effort, comparing very favourably with the sound obtained via high-quality cables. There's no discernible difference in volume or tone and compression is also pleasingly absent – all common criticisms of wireless systems, regardless of price. The AG1 transmitter does its usual excellent, inconspicuous job, while its partner CR77 receiver displays no drop-out or pickup problems, conveying the signal with plenty of depth and dimension, along with minimal colouration, noise and fuss.

Verdict

At this new low price, the Airline 77 makes a great case for going lead-less. That said, street prices are bound to be even more miserly and don't forget the alternative system, employing the pedal-type AOP1 receiver, is already £20 cheaper. Any player should seriously consider the minimal investment involved, because the must-have benefits of freedom, convenience and roadworthy performance offered by Samson's truly innovative solution are almost priceless. **G**

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Guitarist RATING ★★★★★