SubPac S2 | $379

The SubPac promises club level subs at suburb-friendly volume. **Si Truss** feels the noise

WHAT IS IT?

A chair-mounted tactile bass 'speaker' that transmits low frequencies directly to the listener's body

CONTACT

Who: SubPac
Web: http://thesubpac.com

HIGHLIGHTS

1 Adds real clarity to bass frequencies at low volume
2 It won't annoy the neighbours!
3 Innovative and unique

SPECS

Frequency response: 5Hz – 130Hz

I/Os
Wired line input: 3.5mm stereo
Wireless input: Bluetooth 4.0 with A2DP Streaming
Headphone out: 3.5mm stereo
Power: Rechargeable battery: 10.8V, 2300mAh 3-cell Li-ion battery (6+ hrs use)
Charger: 15V 1.6A 24W adaptor with international IEC-C7 cables

Dimensions:
430 x 305 x 40mm

Weight:
1.8kg

SubPac is a tactile bass monitoring system which – in contrast to a standard sub, which works by creating vibrations in the air that are picked up by the ear – transmits 'sound' entirely via physical contact, using transducers to transmit low-frequency information directly into the listener's body. It is currently available in two forms – the M1, a backpack device for portable use and DJing, and the S2, the chair-mounted version we have on test here.

The S2 hardware itself comes in the form of a sleek, black pad, roughly half a metre high and around 5cm thick. It's slightly contoured and fairly comfortable to lean back against, and comes with an adjustable strap for fastening to a chair. Attached to the pad is a control box with 3.5mm jack headphone out and line in ports (although it can also stream audio via Bluetooth), power socket, on/off switch, battery indicator and a central Intensity dial for setting the SubPac level. The control unit contains a rechargeable battery, which apparently has a six hour life per charge.

Feel the bass

In use the SubPac is a fascinating and unique tool. The physical way it translates bass is equivalent to hearing music on a powerful club sound system and – particularly for Dance music producers – the ability to replicate this effect at low volume is something of a revelation. With your back in full contact with the unit it really helps to add clarity to the lower frequencies that are generally lost when working on headphones or a modest monitoring set-up. After getting used to the effect for a while, I began to find it very useful for applications like adjusting the interplay between kicks and basslines, or identifying messy sub frequencies that I'd usually need to rely on a spectral analyser to identify.

There are a few caveats to using the SubPac as a monitoring tool. For one thing, it's only really designed to be used with headphones. While it is possible to use the device with the control box's output connected to a set of nearfield monitors, there's no functionality for compensating for delays or phase issues that might arise from the combination of using room-reliant monitors and the entirely tactile SubPac. It's still entirely usable in this state, but it's not the most refined monitoring system.

Also, as a studio tool at least, the SubPac shouldn't be thought of as a plug-and-play device. As with any new monitoring set-up, it requires a decent amount of cross-referencing and getting used to before you can really trust it as a mixing tool. Use a track you're familiar with hearing via a club system or decent sub in order to calibrate the SubPac. The easily accessible Intensity control is a little misleading for studio use too; at first it's tempting to use it to 'dial in' bass or cut back the SubPac's effects if it's getting a little tiring, but to do so is rather counter-intuitive for mixing purposes. The Intensity is more of a 'set once and leave' parameter, used for levelling the SubPac to suit your own body, room and monitoring system.

In terms of connections and controls, there are a few features we'd like to see added to aid studio use, but we're told a 'pro' version is actually in the works. None of this detracts from the fact that it is a useful and somewhat revolutionary tool. It's not the be-all-and-end-all of bass monitoring but, like a good pair of headphones, we can see it becoming an integral part of the mixing process for many producers. FM

FutureMusic VERDICT

BUILD
VALUE
EASE OF USE
VERSATILITY
RESULTS

A unique and genuinely useful monitoring tool – a must-try for Dance producers