

Tascam HD-P2

Technology changes — often rapidly — but there is a consistent requirement for a well-specified stereo location recorder at a sensible price. Still recovering from the expiry of his old companion portable DAT, **ROB JAMES** is looking for a replacement and expects to be impressed by this sold state recorder.



THERE IS NO SHORTAGE of high-end options for location recorders but for those with less demanding requirements and/or (much) lower budgets, compromise is the rule. The manufacturers' challenge is to deliver an attractive mix of features at the right price.

There are obvious family resemblances in the HD-P2 to my now sadly defunct DAP-1. The two machines are about the same size, control layout is similar and a dual-concentric gain control is a prominent feature of both. However, the HD-P2 eschews DAT as the recording medium in favour of Compact Flash. Type 1 and 2 are supported, which means solid state cards and microdrives can be used. Not all Compact Flash media is equal. Some older and budget cards have little buffering and use slower memory chips and may not be capable of reliable recording at high sample

rates. A list of tested and approved media is available on the Tascam website.

Compared to the DAP-1, the HD-P2 feels like a cheaper build. Matt plastic replaces the rubberised finish of the DAT machine and switches feel somewhat flimsier. But at the much lower price of UK£765 (+ VAT) this can be excused because functionally it is in a completely different league. A shoulder strap, case and a FireWire cable are included.

A sign of the times and the omnipresence of Microsoft is to be found on an interesting licence sticker inside the battery compartment lid. It says: 'WIN CE .NET 4.2 Core'. From this it is fairly safe to assume that the HD-P2 is running an embedded version of Windows.

Following the ancient dictum, 'when all else fails, read the manual', I decided to see how far I could get

before being forced to resort to the reading glasses. Unlike some previous Tascam products the answer is 'a very long way'. Any half-competent recordist could have this machine up and running within five minutes of opening the box. That said, there is a lot of valuable information in the manual and Tascam has thoughtfully provided not only the usual Quick Start Guide but also a Field Reference Card to remind you of convenient shortcuts and where the most commonly used settings are to be found.

Although Compact Flash is a lot more robust than DAT, it isn't indestructible. If something fails in the middle of a recording, you lose it from the last point the file headers were written. To boost reliability and confidence the file headers are continually re-saved during recording. Sample rates go all the way up to 192kHz and there is a choice of 16 or 24 bit resolution.

Powering is versatile and sensible. A mains adapter is supplied or power can be supplied via FireWire. Battery power uses eight AA cells (NiMh preferred) rather than an expensive proprietary pack. All three power sources can be connected simultaneously and the unit uses the logical source (highest voltage) and seamlessly switches to an alternative if the primary source is interrupted. A set of alkalis runs the HD-P2 for around 5 hours.

A project contains an EDL, audio files and a markers file. Default record mode is Append and recordings are made sequentially within a 24-hour timeline. All recording is non-destructive and with Append switched off it is also possible to record anywhere in the 24-hour timeline. EDL is dynamic and plays the most recent recording where more than one exists in the same place. Markers can be dropped manually wherever desired or automatically on 'overs' or incoming timecode dropouts. Markers are related to the timeline independent of the audio files. For output, a composite recording can be consolidated or 'conformed' with a little free application from the Tascam website or all the component files can be transferred via FireWire to a PC or Mac. Alternatively, you can use a workstation to conform material to an EDL with the HD-P2 in timecode chase. For maximum postproduction compatibility, pull-up and pull-down sample rates are supported, even at high-resolution settings.

The HD-P2 supports tri-level sync as used by High Definition video systems as well as the more familiar black and burst and Word clock. The HD-P2 is very unusual in having timecode functions at this price level. Although it cannot generate and output timecode, Broadcast Wav files can be time-stamped from the internal clock or from external LTC. It can also chase external LTC with a variety of jam sync and chase options.

If you need something for extreme conditions, start saving for something several times the price. So long as you don't expect to use it in storm conditions, out at sea or in a tropical jungle then the HD-P2 answers a long-felt need. It's a workflow friendly, stereo recorder with all the core virtues and essentials for more complex production routes. Film Schools and low budget producers among others will love it to bits. ■

Sockets to the right, sockets to the left

On the right hand side panel the analogue audio I-O is pretty much what you would expect. Switchable XLRs for mic/line input with phonos for line in and out. On the opposite side phonos offer SPDIF I-O, there is a headphone jack, BNC for Word clock or video sync input, an XLR for timecode in, a FireWire jack and a P52 socket for connecting a standard PC keyboard. If a keyboard is connected it can be used to control the 'transport' as well as for more convenient naming.

On the top, slide switches set mic/line and -20dB pads individually for left and right channels. Phantom power, 18dB/octave 100Hz Low Cut, Limiter and limiter Stereo Link all affect both channels. A small internal mic is fitted and a switch determines whether the left input uses this or the main mic input. The remainder of the top surface controls are menu keys and the shuttle/data wheel together with the Rewind, Fast Forward, Stop and Play keys. Record, Pause, Timecode, Locate, Marker and Retake keys are on the front panel. The Retake key deletes the last recording and sets up to rerecord with a single button press. A prerecord cache enables the last five or ten seconds of audio to be captured before the Record button is pressed from standby.



PROS	Well priced; good feature set; timecode.
CONS	No TC output; a bit fragile; screen visibility in bright sunlight.

Contact

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