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MicroMemo voice recorder for iPod

Is this good enough to ditch your dedicated dictaphone?

by Davey Winder published on 29 March 2007

Because I am a journalist I get to do journalist things like travel to interesting places, I am writing this review in a hotel room in Rome for example, and meet interesting people. Unfortunately, I often have to record what those interesting people are saying as I need to write it up as an interview, part of a feature or just as research.

Seeing as my shorthand skills are as accomplished as Boris Johnson is diplomatic, this requires the use of a digital voice recorder. Thankfully in recent years these have got smaller and smaller, and my main recording squeeze has been a smaller than a small chocolate bar sized Olympus digital device for a couple of years now.

Which is why I was quite interested in getting hold of the MicroMemo for the Video iPod and giving it a very real world testing. This is even smaller than my Olympus, being the same width and thickness as the 5th generation iPod itself, and only adding an inch to the overall length of the thing.

It weighs nothing, or as near as dammit, and draws its power from the iPod so I can do away with the pocket full of Duracells and the overdraft from the bank to keep the supply topped up. And talking of pockets, because this integrates with my iPod it is one less thing to get lost while availing myself of the wonderful hospitality of foreign airport security checkpoints.

But, most importantly of all, does it actually work? The answer is a big yes, but with some small reservations. It is certainly a lot better than the iPod voice recorders of old that used the headphone socket to connect and were best summed up as toys rather than serious recording workhorses.

The MicroMemo connects by way of the dock



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connector and this really does make a difference to the audio quality, which goes right up to 16-bit at 44Khz. Which is why it's such a shame that the supplied long and bendy microphone is such a naff monaural affair. It's not that it is appallingly bad, and a cheap mic does keep the overall price down, but plug a decent microphone into the 3.5mm mini jack on the MicroMemo and the differences are just astounding.

I used my trusty Sony ECM-DM5P, a bullet sized mic that truly brings the MicroMemo to stereo life. If all you want to do is take a few notes on the move, a bit of mobile creativity, then the supplied bendy stick will suffice. For recording podcasts and making professional interview recordings you would be well advised to upgrade.

My only other complaint would be that the built-in speaker is as good as useless, quiet in the extreme and really to be avoided. Use a pair of headphones and there are no complaints, and considering this is attached to an iPod it's a small niggle anyway. Apart from the obvious "why bother" to include a speaker if it doesn't work?

What certainly does work is the iPod integration, plug it in and your iPod automatically adopts Voice Memo mode, ready and waiting to record, pause, save and playback your recordings. Files are saved in WAV format, so no problems with device portability, although it would be nice to be able to label them with something other than just date and time on the iPod itself. Makes for something of a retrieval nightmare if you've made a load of recordings on the road and want to find a particular one quickly.

Finally, I should mention that there is also a line input selector for the 3.5mm mini jack which means that it is possible to connect it to a mixing desk, for example, although I never tested this so cannot comment on the result. For the wannabe podcaster this has to be the cheapest way to get into professional mobile broadcasting.

VERDICT

For the money you simply will not get a more Pocket-lint.com, the premier gadget news and reviews website in the UK

At a glance

What is it?

iPod Digital Audio Recorder

Good

Size, ability to plug in external mic, recorded audio quality

Bad

Crappy built-in speakers, so-so mono mic supplied as standard

Verdict

Turns your Video iPod into a portable professional recording studio - sort of

Price £35

Our score

8/10

Your score

?/10

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portable and professional voice recorder. An absolute must have for the iPod owner - but get a decent mic.

Oh, and in case you were wondering, you geeky reader you, here are the recording specs:

Bit Rate 352 kb/s to 1411 kb/s

Sample Rate 22.05 kHz to 44.10 kHz

1-Minute Recording 2.6 MB to 10.3 MB

1-Hour Recording 156 MB to 618 MB

Recording Capacity (30GB iPod) between 48 and 192 hours

Recording Capacity (60GB iPod) between 98 and 384 hours