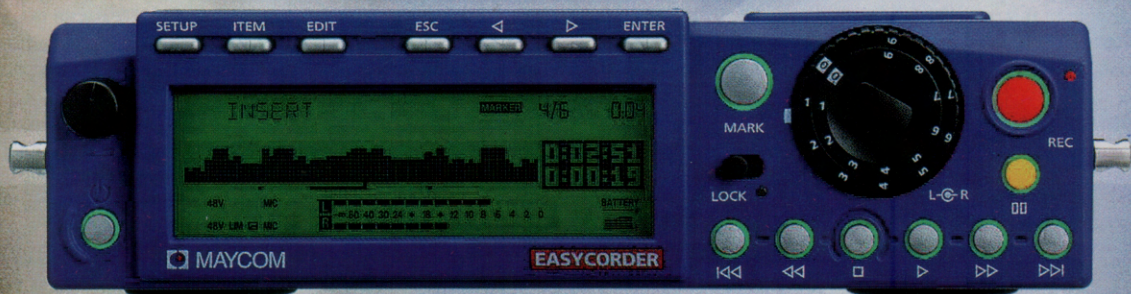


# maycom



# easycorder

**Impressed with the Maycom EasyCorder, the latest direct-to-disk location recorder, ROB TAYLERSON was left with a feeling of inspired confidence.**

**T**he art of location recording is all about confidence. The confidence of the producer/director that the sound recordist is competent, the confidence that the artist/interviewee will perform and, most importantly for the recordist, the confidence that his or her equipment will not fail at the vital moment.

The delivery man recently dropped a Maycom EasyCorder solid state portable recorder onto my mat and I have to say that from the start it has inspired confidence in me. Maycom have borrowed from other popular location recorders in terms of styling and layout. As a result of this, the user feels at home with this unit and does not feel as if they are taking a step into the unknown world of location direct-to-disk recording.

#### **A Rugged Beast**

The EasyCorder is a rugged beast, no bigger than the popular HHB PortaDat, and weighs about the same.

Its case is a mixture of metal and hardened plastic, which feels more than able to deal with the thrills and spills of being bumped about on location. Its recording medium is solid state, using either the EasyCorder's internal memory or a PCMCIA card (Type III). This is unquestionably different from most people's experience of location recording, but once you've inserted the disk and selected your desired set-up for the day, the fact that there are no moving tapes in sight has no real effect on your working practice.

The input/output options are pretty standard, including a headphone socket, mic/line inputs and outputs on balanced XLRs, AES digital output, SPDIF input and output and an LPT digital output for transferring audio to a notebook/desktop PC. Powering options include a 12V XLR power socket as well as the large battery that clips onto the back of the unit. The battery is not insubstantial to say the least and is probably responsible for about one third of the unit's weight! That said, the unit does not feel too heavy, so I suppose this is a good design, as the unit



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► can record for up to six hours on one battery with an accurate front-panel display of remaining battery life.

The front panel is well laid out with a large LCD and all the normal audio recorder controls as well as seven dedicated keys for selecting various menu options. The whole issue of having to select options from menus is something that I suspect does not appeal to location recordists. It's fine, in the comfort of a warm, multitrack studio, to show off your knowledge of the complex menu structure of a particular recording device. But, when standing in the middle of a field in driving rain and a force-nine gale, it's just not the done thing to keep everyone else waiting whilst you hunt through eight sub-menus looking for a way of setting the sample rate. Maycom have shown some understanding of this fact with a system of presets that a user can choose from that will set sample rate, data rate, mono/stereo etc. in one

## Recording

That's enough of menus and data rates, what about actually recording something? I subjected the Easycorder to my standard review test of ignoring the manual, plugging in a stereo mic and seeing how far I got before needing to refer to the manual. This proved straightforward and only required using the set of switches on the top of the unit to select mic input and switch on phantom power. To start recording you just press the red REC button and off you go.

Recording level is controlled from the front panel with a large black dial with separate left and right settings. Recording can be paused at any time without creating a new track.

One feature that I like very much is called 'timeshift' recording. It's a simple idea but well thought out, allowing you to start the recording but the unit actually loops a 20-second recording in RAM. Once the event you are

While this seems a bit of a rash statement, I have to admit that the unit didn't falter once during the recordings that I made, and I subjected it to a day tramping around farms for the BBC.

Whilst recording you can place markers within a track, thereby allowing easy access to specific points in a recording whilst editing. Yes, you can do non-destructive editing on this unit!

## Editing

Once you have made your recording it is available for editing on the unit; the normal STOP, PLAY, FF, RW buttons can be used to review the track and a MARK button to place markers at the in and out points where you wish to edit.

Editing functions include COPY, ADD, INSERT and DELETE. To perform any of these functions you just need to place your markers at each end of the desired section and either copy it to the clipboard or delete it. A section that has been placed on the clipboard can either be added to the end of a track or inserted at a marker point in that or any other track. All editing is non-destructive, with the Easycorder storing your edit information as an internal EDL for playback when required.

These editing facilities are relatively basic and the waveform display on the LCD screen is far from elegant but, for a journalist quickly compiling a story for a bulletin whilst still on location, they would happily suffice. Combining the Easycorder with an ISDN codec would make quite a powerful combination for reporters who can't (or don't want to) return to base to file a story.

The LPT port allows connection to a laptop or desktop PC, which, in conjunction with a Windows application supplied by Maycom, allows access to the internal drive/PCMCIA card for transferring audio files for editing or archiving. As one of Maycom's main markets for the Easycorder is broadcast news, the facility to quickly make your audio available to colleagues is essential, and being able to hand over a PCMCIA card is a lot quicker than copying in real time to a desktop editor.

All in all, the Easycorder impressed me. It is well thought out with many facilities, such as the timeshift recording feature, that will particularly appeal to broadcast recordists. It feels robust and well made, as well as being perfectly straightforward to use. I would be happier with some kind of confidence monitoring though, as it's always nice to be able to say, 'it was there when I recorded it' when required. □



action. This obviously requires that there is already a preset that is right for the job, but it only took me five minutes to create one before setting out on a recording job, so this is not an arduous duty.

When creating a preset the user can choose between linear recording and MPEG compression. If linear recording is chosen, the user is prompted to choose between mono, mono mix (ie. stereo input mixed to mono) and stereo recording. Sample rates from 16k to 48k bit rates are available as well and RAW or BWF file formats. If you choose MPEG compression as the recording standard you have the extra options of data rate (8kbps to 448kbps) and J-Stereo, which is a specific MPEG stereo encoding system. A preset can also include the desired input, ie. analogue or digital, and the digital audio output format, ie. AES or SPDIF. This surprised me as I'm used to digital audio devices playing back audio to all outputs in the appropriate format — but maybe I'm being picky now!

waiting for actually starts you press the REC button again and the 20 seconds in RAM is put on disk and recording continues as normal.

I can think of many occasions when I've been recording a long-winded press conference knowing that I cannot afford to record everything but must not miss that one important bit of spin. This feature would be invaluable in that instance.

All recordings are automatically numbered and time/date stamped. The LCD panel provides all the information a user could want, including input levels, mic/line and phantom power settings for each analogue input and battery power levels. Unlike a portable DAT machine, you don't have the benefit of being able to listen off-tape but Maycom's website does make reference to an 'off-chip monitoring' feature which is planned for a future upgrade. When I asked Maycom about the need for confidence monitoring they pointed out that, in their testing of the Easycorder, the unit had been so reliable that they didn't feel that there was much need for this facility.

## INFORMATION

- £ **Maycom Easycorder from £1835 + VAT (Euro 2385).**
- Ⓐ **UK Distributor: Canford Audio.**
- ☎ **+44 (0)191 417 0057.**
- ☎ **+44 (0)191 416 0392.**
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