

Samson Meteor USB mic

Samson Microphone's revolutionary new USB condenser mic is aimed at the 'lower budget' market. Phil Harding finds it has a role for the pros, too

Price and Availability

£100 (€115)
Distributed by Korg UK
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Website: www.samsontech.com

Samson Technologies is renowned for good quality budget microphone solutions and has already released a number of USB microphones aimed at the computer recording market. The company's latest version is called The Meteor Mic and, as you can see from the picture, it looks like it just landed from Mars and is carrying a number of very small aliens onboard.

USB microphones are a new territory for me, as they would be for most working audio professionals. What can we expect from a studio condenser mic with a 1" (25mm) condenser capsule that has a built-in audio interface and only costs £100? Not a lot, you might think; but I was very impressed by its easy-to-use design and high-quality sonics straight out of the box.

The features you find are clever indeed and really quite mind-boggling for the mic's tiny size (see tech spec, right). It fits into the palm of your hand and has three legs that pop out from the side of the microphone to form a very neat 'table' stand – perfect for sitting next to your laptop or computer keyboard. It also has a fitting underneath for use with a standard mic stand. This turns it into a studio microphone flexible enough to record acoustic guitars, vocals and any other real instrument you care to try it on.

My test session with the Meteor went



very smoothly. It has a small LED light on the front that turns blue when it's receiving power, red when you're overloading the input level and yellow when it is muted (a button on the front performs this). Around that mute button is a neat, circular volume control for the latency-free headphone output of the audio interface at the back of the mic. All of this is easy to operate and understand with no need to refer to the manual.

The recorded sound for the acoustic guitar tracks and the vocal overdubs had clarity and depth, and the built-in pop shield was also very effective for voice recording. The same overdubs recorded using a standard studio (larger capsule) condenser mic had a wider spatial sound compared with the Meteor but other than that, the Samson came through the test with flying colours.

The Meteor mic frequency response is quoted at 20Hz-20kHz and there is pre-set HPF gently rolling off from 100Hz and a slight boost around 10kHz to help the microphone sound pleasing straight into your computer. The quality of the 1/8" TRS headphone output is also good with plenty of headroom.

Would I make this my first choice among a collection of quality studio condenser microphones? No. Would I make this the first choice to take on the road with me or use in a portable laptop recording for some quick recording and overdubs when the ideas are flowing quickly? Yes!

The two things that lets it down here is the lack of USB lead length, an extension would have been handy, and the other big let down is that there is no XLR standard

microphone output. This will make it somewhat limiting with some computer sequencer and recording systems. It worked fine with GarageBand on my MacBook Pro; it also works with Logic, Cubase, Reason, Ableton, Cakewalk and Pro Tools 9 without any technical problems. But, because the Meteor's only output

is USB, there will be a conflict with Pro Tools versions 8 and older, which like to have only one interface to look at at a time.

I also tested the Meteor for it's other design intentions – VoIP, web chatting and webcasting. Having struggled through a meeting with audio professionals and educationalists where one person was in Finland via Skype and we, in London, were trying to engage him in the meeting with a fairly regular external USB speaker and built-in mic combo, I switched over to the Meteor and fed my own portable speakers from the headphone output of the Meteor interface. The difference was remarkable, immediately we had a clearer playback sound feeding to us from Finland and suddenly he could hear everyone in our room – including those some 10ft or more from the microphone with much improved quality. Job done!

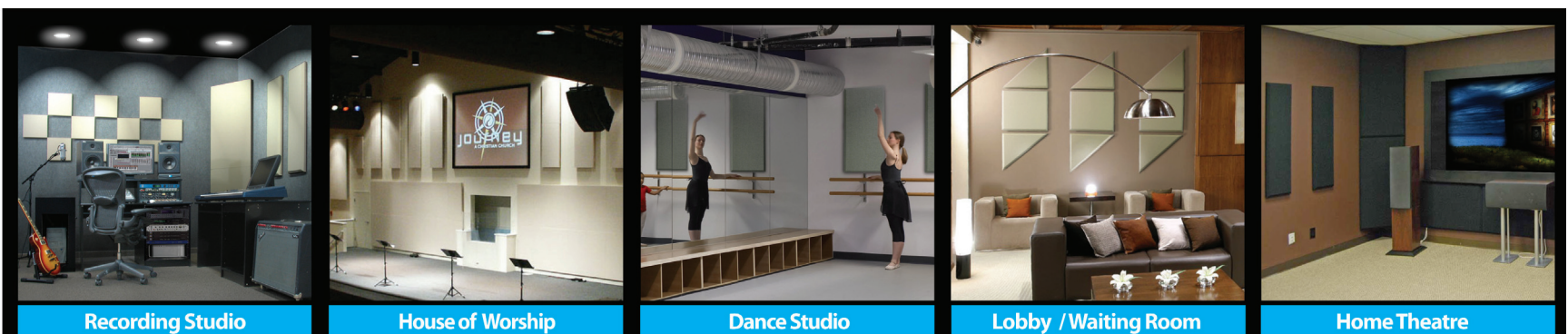
Basically I am converted and will be seriously considering adding the Samson Meteor to my pool of gadgets and mic collection. In fact I may refuse to send this unit back to distributors Korg UK [Don't do that, Phil! – Ed].

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

- Polar pattern: cardioid
- Frequency response: 20-20,000Hz
- Headphone output: 85mW at 16 ohms
- Maximum SPL: 120dB
- Size: 1.92" x 3.9" (49mm x 100mm)
- Weight: 10.25oz (288g)

PROS AND CONS

- Pros**
- Ease of use straight out of the box
 - Excellent full-range sound for a small capsule
 - Cute looks and revolutionary design
 - Very affordable
- Cons**
- No XLR output
 - No shockmount
 - No attenuator pad
 - No extension USB cable included
 - But what do we expect for 100 quid?



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