

DPA Windpac

Daring to challenge an industry standard with a different take on the business of wind cheating, the Danes have come up with an innovative and legitimate alternative design solution that also folds down to almost nothing. NEIL HILLMAN decides that he wouldn't want to have it to open up in his pocket.



CUMBERSOME AND SHORT-LIVED or innovative and stylishly efficient? Overlooking the Hindenburg's fatal, but 70 years ahead of its time, policy of asking smokers to leave the Airship's first class lounge if they fancied a fag, these lighter-than-air craft built by the German Zeppelin company were traversing the globe well before conventional aeroplanes could provide little more than a short hop and a quick gin and tonic. So, efficient — yes; but undoubtedly cumbersome.

Appropriately launched in the Zeppelin's fatherland at AES Berlin 2004, the Zeppelin-esque Windpac windshields from DPA have a hard act to follow, given the ubiquitous nature of Rycote Windshield's place and pedigree in the market. Rycote were the first, and up to now have remained, the best choice for professional location recordists needing to balance the equations of performance against cost, and reliability against replaceability. It is simply impossible to use the interference-tube type microphones, such as the Sennheiser 416 or the Pearl MS-8 stereo shot-gun, outdoors without a windshield such as a Rycote — or the very close design-copy by Sennheiser itself — even on the gentlest of days.

Comprising of just two main parts, a shockmount and the windshield itself, the DPA Windpac (UK £530+VAT) is

fabricated from light materials and plastics with a claimed saving in weight of 50% over its rivals. However, this becomes much less obvious once like is compared with like — with it fully assembled and a microphone in place at the end of a boom-pole — due mainly to the Windpac's off-middle centre-of-gravity. In fact, in hand-held mode, its lack of a proper pistol-grip makes the device unwieldy to handle. But for most applications, these microphones will be fixed to a boom-pole or a stand, and exposed to the elements.

The specially-developed thin and light gauze material covering the sprung-steel frame of the windshield contributes to its overall lightness: acoustically more transparent than the substances used by its rivals, yet fully windproof at gusts of up to 70mph, and waterproof; moisture simply runs off the surface, protecting the precious investment ensconced within. Ideal qualities then for that on-board, America's Cup location assignment.

The microphone housing is accessed via a quick-release end cap, hinged from the main body of the windshield with soft rubber strips, and secured by two sprung pegs on the cap locating into two mating sockets on the rim of the windshield body. The cradle itself provides effective shockmounting, made from rigid extruded plastic, with soft rubber suspension straps and elasticated locking tensioners to hold either one or two microphones securely in place. The 'V' design of the two microphone support brackets enable a range of mic diameters to be accommodated — a stepped lugg allowing the elasticated locking-band to be captured in a variety of tensioning positions and the microphone support itself to be adjusted on its suspension, to ensure the mic sits in the middle of the windshield body.

The unique nature of the Windpac is in its collapsible nature, akin to the large Lastolight reflectors much-loved by cameramen that with just a flick of the wrist fold down from the size of a squash court to the size of a dinner plate. Similarly, with a twist, the Windpac's windshield envelope stows flat, saving the enormous volume it otherwise occupies, slipping neatly into a

small carry-case supplied by DPA.

The microphone cradle is located into place by pushing it onto the windshield's frame, through a pair of push-fit location slots, and is locked in its rightful place when the end cap is secured over the end of the windshield. The Windpac then literally hangs off the rear bracket of the shockmount, secured solely by the insertion of the two plastic locking pins at the back of the assembly; the sparseness of this arrangement contributes to the low mechanical transmission noise of the Windpac, which can become a problem when handling an assembly like this.

The signal connections from the microphone are brought through the windshield by a short, right-angled XLR coupler, supplied by DPA with the Windpac, that sits securely within the stem of the shockmount and removes the need for a heavy XLR cable to be left clunking around the noise-sensitive end of the set-up.

In use, the DPA Windpac meets its design brief admirably. It out-performed both the 'fluffed' and 'un-fluffed' Rycote I compared it to in a stiff breeze, with no small part being played by the markedly larger pocket of still air the Windpac places around the mic. Sadly, I was unable to secure a berth on any Transatlantic racing yachts to make the ultimate comparison for *Resolution*. Living in Birmingham means being as far from the sea as it is possible to be in the UK; but when the rain fell and the wind whipped across Edgbaston reservoir, Midland Sailing Club's dinghies took to the water and I did my best to provide that near-ultimate test.

I think that the DPA Windpac is expensive; much more so in the UK than a Rycote for instance, and it remains to be seen if it will replace the Rycote in the journeyman's everyday kit. Yet in extreme Outside Broadcast conditions, like a Rugby League match on a wet Winter night, it performs brilliantly. ■

PROS

Its wet weather performance compared to a soaking 'fluffy' windshield is excellent; with the larger protective 'still-air' around the microphone giving it a greater edge over its rivals.

CONS

It is expensive compared to its main rival and less user-friendly.

EXTRAS

The Windpac is water resistant as it is treated with a fine coating of protective chemical. However, for extended rainy outdoor use applications DPA has developed a Rain Cover to protect the windshield and microphone. This is now included in the kit.

The Rain Cover is a thin piece of foam that easily pulls over the windshield. It breaks the speed of heavy rain drops, absorbing the sound of the drop, and acts as a shield against water damage to the mic in heavy rain. The foam material means the product is still extremely light.

Also, the locking mechanism on the Windpac's rear lid has been replaced with a more simple opening system with miniature handles to be turned instead of pinched.



Contact

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