

Enhanced Audio M600

A microphone suspension? Not just an ordinary mic mount but one that unlike most proprietary models fits a very wide range of microphone types. Oh, and it also makes your mics sound better too. **JON THORNTON** is pleasantly surprised.



THIS WAS ALWAYS GOING to be a tricky review. The designer of the M600 microphone mount had already let slip to me that the initial thinking behind it had stemmed from looking at 'performance enhancing' accessories for hi-fi systems. Secondly, I still had the words of last issue's *Slaying Dragons* column echoing in my brain and extolling the dangers inherent in audiophile testing. But perhaps most intriguingly was the collection of testimonials from some extremely well respected individuals about the performance of what seems, at first glance, to be a bit of audio voodoo.

Time for some more details. The M600 is first and foremost a universal microphone mount, capable of firmly holding pretty much any microphone whose external diameter doesn't exceed 65mm. It consists of

two rings of machined aluminium, each of which is drilled and tapped at three equidistant points. Through each of these points is an adjustable screw, which terminates in a plastic thrust pad. A microphone is then held in position inside the rings and all six screws adjusted so that it is clamped securely at six points. The material used to manufacture the thrust pads ensures that they don't twist against the microphone body, and also protects the microphone casing from damage. The two rings are attached to some further machined aluminium parts that incorporate a swivel joint ending in a standard microphone stand thread. In all, the looks are equal measures of engineering elegance and instrument of torture, but in practice it works very well, securely clamping all types of microphone body styles.

That could be the end of the story — a nicely engineered universal microphone mount (and incidentally the only one I've found other than the original clip that can hold an ElectroVoice RE20!) But the claims of the designer, David Browne, go much further than this. Convinced that the traditional suspension mounts or solid clips supplied with most microphones were compromising their performance, the materials employed in the M600's construction were chosen to ensure a very low resonant frequency. This, coupled with the rigidity of the clamping mechanism is claimed to reduce the transmission of infrasonic, structure-borne vibrations to the microphone. While conventional wisdom would suggest that these frequencies are going to have little effect given the frequency response of the microphones and the range of human hearing, tests would seem to suggest otherwise.

In order to remove as much subjectivity and bias as possible, a matched pair of Schoeps CMC5s with omni capsules was initially set up — one in a conventional fixed clip and the other in the M600. Both were patched through identical Amek 9098 mic preamplifiers, and recorded. The microphones were kept as coincident as possible, and a variety of sources used, including male and female vocals, acoustic guitar and percussion. Due to a slight comedy moment involving a duff shield on one of the mic cables, and the attempts at identifying this via deduction and substitution, at the time of audition nobody was really sure which microphone was which. We elected to keep it this way until the recordings had been played back, and

only then did we subsequently check — again, trying to remove any preconceptions about the effect of the M600. An assistant was employed to switch between the recorded tracks in a random pattern, and several pairs of ears invited to give their judgement.

There was unanimous agreement that there was a difference between the recordings. It's slight, but very obvious. Most notable was a sense of 'tightening' in the low mids and bass, creating a very 'solid' sound. Coupled with this, or maybe as a result of this, was the sense that some of the more objectionable room sounds — a kind of 300Hz honk — was suppressed. Other differences were harder to quantify, and were not unanimously identified. Some listeners thought that there was a greater sense of high frequency definition, others not. Just to be on the safe side, and to eliminate the possibility of signal path differences, the microphones were physically swapped in the mounts, while retaining their original signal path. The results were the same for the microphone in the M600.

Having tried a small diaphragm microphone, the same comparison was made using a pair of C414s — again on an omni pattern, with the 'control' 414 in a conventional suspension mount. If anything, the 'tightening' characteristic observed with the Schoeps was a little more pronounced, particularly as the distance from source to microphone was increased.

There are downsides, of course. Suppression of mechanical noise (i.e. kicking the microphone stand) was much better with a conventional suspension mount than with the M600, and I'm sure that there are some microphones out there that are wider than the 65mm capacity of the clip (Blue Bottle owners are going to have to give this one a miss). Then there's the cost — at around £150 this is an expensive microphone clip — although you've got to put that in the context of the £80 or so that Neumann will charge you for a conventional solid mount for a U87.

Nevertheless, this is a very well engineered, flexible microphone mount that does seem to alter the way a microphone sounds — so for the money you could argue that it effectively gives you a whole cupboard full of new microphones. Audio Voodoo? I have to admit that I went into this review sceptically and came out surprised. I'm not going to even attempt to debate the underlying theory or establish why it works — although as one user testimonial points out, this does make for some interesting arguments over a pint or two... ■

PROS

Well engineered; fits nearly every type of microphone; seems to tighten and enhance the low end of microphone response.

CONS

Not as good at mechanical knock suppression; expensive.

Contact

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