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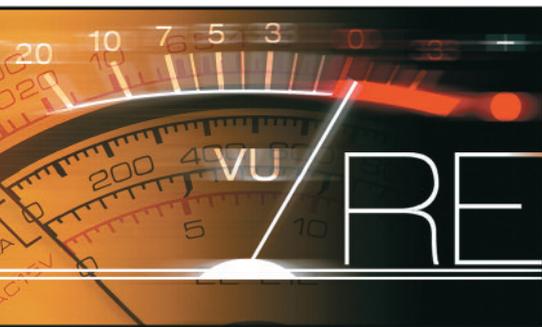
12 PRODUCTS REVIEWED

HOT LIVE RECORDERS from JoeCo, Korg, Roland, Yamaha, and Zoom

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Audio-Technica AT4080 and AT4081:
something new in the world of ribbon mics



REVIEW

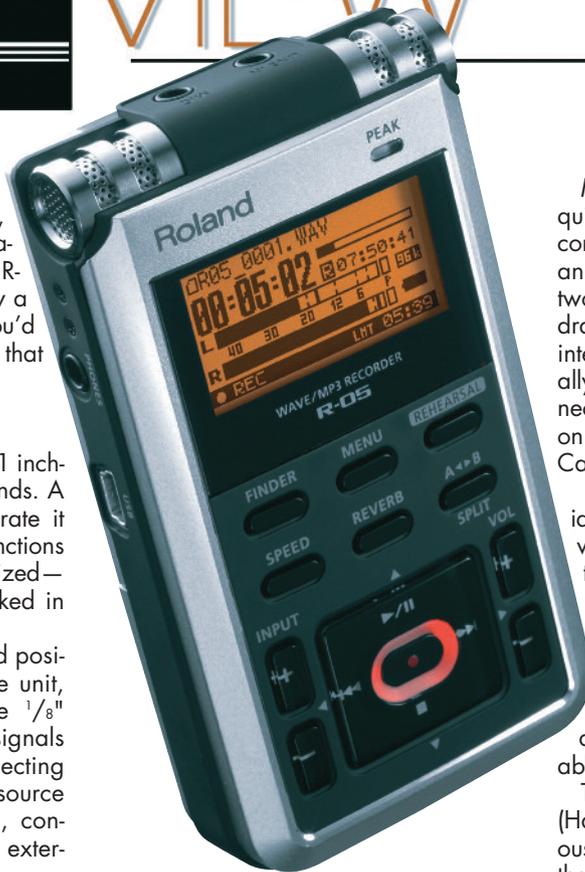
BY LORENZ RYCHNER

The field of pocket- and palm-sized recorders is a crowded one, and yet we keep seeing new variations on the old theme. The Roland R-05 is no exception—it has not only a full complement of the features you'd expect, but also something special that might surprise you. Let's see...

In your hand

The measurements of 4 x 2.25 x 1 inches make the R-05 fit even small hands. A right- or lefthanded user can operate it single-handedly as soon as the functions of the buttons have been memorized—they are hard to read, being marked in very faint grey on black.

The mics at the top are in a fixed position, flush with the contours of the unit, and between them are separate 1/8" stereo mini inputs for line-level signals and for an external mic. Connecting either an external mic or a line source disables the built-in mics. In turn, connecting a line source disables the external mic jack.



Much of that organization might be quicker to do on your computer—the USB connection makes your R-05 appear like an external drive on your desktop, and two-way file exchange is as simple as drag-and-drop. Since the R-05 has no internal memory, what the computer actually needs to see is the SD card, so connection without a card results in no action on your computer and a display of "No Card" on the screen of the R-05.

The Menu button gives access to a myriad of functions and associated settings, well documented in the owners' manual that is available for download.

The Speed button activates playback speed deviation, at a speed selectable in ten steps from 50% to 150%, without pitch variation. The frequently found opposite—pitch variation with constant speed—is not available on the R-05.

The Reverb button activates an effect (Hall1, Hall2, Room, Plate) that you previously select in Menu mode, together with the depth, for playback only.

Roland R-05 Portable Recorder

Solid portable recording features, plus welcome surprises

The Input Setup menu lets you choose mono or stereo. Set it to mono and use an external mic and only the left channel will be recorded. If you use a mono mic and wish both left and right channels to carry the identical mono signal, leave the input set to stereo.

But let's complete the walk around the unit for now: The right narrow side has the power/hold toggle and the jack for the optional AC adapter (not supplied). The left narrow side has the USB port and the 1/8" mini-jack for phones/line audio out.

The main surface is quite busy. A peak LED sits above the screen which is very readable for its small size. Below, taking up slightly more than half the remaining surface, are six buttons, two ± button pairs, and a square four-way control with a center button.

The underside has the lid to the battery well (two AA cells, alkaline or NiMH, which the R-05 cannot recharging) and a threaded 1/4" socket for mounting the recorder on a stand or tripod. Higher up and to one side are three two-position sliders, for low or

high mic gain, limiter on/off, and lowcut on/off. At the top is the cover of the SD-card slot. A lanyard can be threaded through a pass-through on the narrow lower side.

All in all this recorder felt good in my hand—weighty enough to make its presence felt, easily gripped and operated.

Functions

The R-05 is stated as being able to run on two alkaline batteries for about 30 hours during continuous playback, and about 16 hours during continuous recording, "depending on environmental conditions and method of use". Fair enough. Power can be preserved by setting the display timer to dim, and the unit to shut off altogether after an adjustable period of inactivity.

A Finder button gives access to the filing system. You'll probably need to read the (excellent) manual to get the hang of all the possibilities of organizing in folders, moving, copying, splitting, combining, trimming (tops and tails), converting MP3-to-WAV, deleting, naming, or renaming of your files.

The A/B - Split button lets you cycle between two points, or—during recording—hit a split point and creating a new file on the fly. This will be best used during non-critical recordings like speech, lectures and such, since it creates an audible hiccup on playback during sequential play of the now split files.

Seriously helpful

As you set up the recorder functions, you can choose from among WAV at 16-bit or 24-bit (with sample rates of 44.1, 48, 88.2, or 96 kHz!), or seven MP3 settings from 64 kbps to 320 kbps (at 44.1 or 48 kHz).

There is one more, my favorite—the "WAV+MP3" setting. It defaults to 16-bit WAV and 128 kbps MP3, and is only available if the sample rate has been selected as 44.1 kHz or 48 kHz... and yes, it records both at once, and creates two files at a time. This is perfect for those instances where you want to take a recording to your computer for serious work, but before you even leave the

scene of your crime you already have to share the file, maybe with your band members, or for an internet upload. Now you can share the quickie MP3 and take the serious WAV file home without having to make a copy and convert it.

The R-05 can play back 16-bit and 24-bit WAV files at 32/44.1/48/88.2/96 kHz, and MP3 files of 32-320 kbps, plus variable bit rate, at 32/44.1/48 kHz.

While we're on the topic of seriously helpful functions: a Pre-Rec function, once enabled in the menus, will always buffer sound for two seconds before you press record. Never miss the start of a sound event, not if you can jump to and hit Record within two seconds...

Another helpful function is the Auto Rec Start. You can either set a timer (2/5/10 seconds) or a level (-60 dB/-30 dB/-20 dB) to trigger the Record function. You can press Record, place the R-05 in its position, and have a clean start to your recording instead of recording handling clunks and scratching noises.

And—for some people—I saved the potentially best function for last: Rehearsal. If you hate AGC and limiter recordings with their pumping and unrealistic volume boosts during soft passages, but—without a remote—don't dare to touch the recorder during recording to make level adjustments because that creates contact noises, you'll love the Rehearsal function!

It works like this: You disable the AGC, go into Menu mode and select a rehearsal time length (or Manual—you'll decide when enough is enough), then, back on the main screen, have your intended audio source play (as in "tell the band to play a loud passage from a song") while you press the Rehearsal button and point the R-05 towards the sound source. It reads the loudest passage and adjusts the input level accordingly. If the mic gain is set wrong, you get an alert on the screen. Neat, eh?

All in all

The R-05 is a thoughtfully designed and eminently practical recorder that addresses the real-world problems of a recordist. It gets around the problem inherent in all small recorders that lack a remote, that of the recording of handling noises when the user had to touch controls during the recording, and it does that with the three features of auto-start, pre-record, and rehearsal mode.

The microphones on the R-05 captured my sound sources very well, including an exquisite large chamber orchestra in a fine concert hall, with all the subtle tonal shadings and suprisingly rich bass. It was a joy to use and I can highly recommend it. ➔

Price: \$299

More from: Roland Corp. US,
www.rolandus.com.