



**T**he DRM-85 (digital recording microphone) – better known as the ‘FlashMic’ – is an extremely convenient ‘one stop shop’ for the roving radio reporter or journalist. It combines an excellent quality omnidirectional condenser microphone (built by Sennheiser) with an internal, battery-powered digital audio recorder. All this is housed in a robust, impressive looking metal casing, and operated with simple, easy to use controls.

### Overview

Weighing in at nearly 1lb (400 grams), even Robbie Williams would find it difficult to do one of his famous mic finger twirls with the FlashMic, but it does feel sturdy to hold and certainly looks the professional part when doing an interview. The omni mic capsule has a useful high presence peak at around 5kHz which gives it a tight punchy sound on speech, but without being too ‘gritty.’ The polar response below 1kHz certainly seems to be that of a good omni too, and it seemed pretty resilient against handling and wind noise.

# HHB FLASHMIC

**Paul Hedges MIBS reviews HHB’s new – but already remarkably popular – ‘recording microphone.’**

Operating the recorder and general ‘user fiddling’ is courtesy of three primary buttons (Rec, Play and Stop/Menu), plus a very intuitive multi-function jogswitch which acts as a selector, enter button and on-off switch. An LCD window shows the various menus, battery and recording levels, and also indicates whether you’re actually recording or playing back. These controls can be used to access and alter functions such as sample frequency and bit rate, high pass filter, headphone monitoring level (there’s a 3.5mm stereo headphone socket at the base of the mic), battery type, and track deletion.

The latest firmware version (4-04-06) has resolved most of the bugs and corrected a few operational foibles of earlier versions. These include fixes to some MPEG header and coding algorithm issues, as well as fixing the slightly odd metering ballistics, the monitoring level discrepancy between record and playback, and the inaccurate battery life metering.

### Software

However, configuring the FlashMic using the onboard controls is rather fiddly, and it’s probably more advisable to install the supplied FlashMic Manager software on a suitable computer – it’s compatible with both Windows (XP and 2000) and Mac OSX platforms. The connection between the mic and a computer is via a mini USB socket at the bottom of the mic.

The latest version is V4-0-0 and amongst many minor improvements and fixes this includes a very useful new facility, which is the ability to transfer MPEG encoded files with either .wav or .mp2 extensions – necessary for compatibility with some audio editing applications. The latest versions of both the firmware and Manager software can be downloaded from the [www.flashmic.info](http://www.flashmic.info) website, and updating them is very straightforward.

The FlashMic Manager software enables the creation of various different configurations which can then be transferred to the mic and recalled as user presets – which is much easier than adjusting individual parameters in the field.

If the mic is going to be used by a number of people and for a variety of different projects, the software allows you

to name individual mics, generate sensible presets with meaningful user names and make reference or housekeeping notes. Some of this text is stored as header information and is shown in the mic’s display window, while other fields are written into the BEXT data chunk along with the date and time stamp within the sound file and can be read by compatible editing systems.

Useful as the FlashMic Manager software is, you don’t need to have it installed if you just want to access the recorded audio from the mic. The internal storage mounts automatically when you connect the USB socket to any computer, and the audio files can be dragged and dropped in the usual way. You don’t even need batteries installed to access the audio files via USB.

### No Editing

It’s perhaps worth pointing out that there are absolutely no sound editing facilities in the mic (apart from a track delete option), so don’t imagine you can start chopping up your work during the taxi ride back to the studio – you’ll need to download the audio to a computer to do that! However, you can set ‘Mark’ points during both record and playback to help navigate files.

You also need to bear in mind that the one gigabyte of memory in the FlashMic is internal and fixed. You can’t replace it with a fresh memory card when it gets full, so you’ll either have to plan to download material via USB to make space for new recordings, or chose a data reduced recording format that gives increased storage capacity. Recording at 44.1kHz 16 bit linear, gives about three and a quarter hours of space, and this increases to almost 18 and a half hours if you choose MPEG1 Layer II at 32kHz.

The battery life from the two alkaline AA cells within the DRM85 seemed reasonable and was certainly up to the constant recording, playback, erasing and USB connections I put the mic through. Changing the batteries is simply a question of unscrewing the end of the shaft and popping open the cover. You’ve got one minute to replace the batteries before you lose the time and date settings in the mic, but the recorded files are preserved



regardless - even if you're daft enough to do it while the machine is recording!

#### In Use

The major selling point of the FlashMic for me is that it is just so convenient. It takes about five seconds to power up and goes 'E to E' straight away so that you are able to hear the output of the mic via the 3.5mm earphone socket without having to be in pause record mode. The level meter is

situations, including simultaneously feeding the headphone output to a mixer for a live PA feed at the same time as making a recording, and the results were excellent. Handling noise was generally fine, as long as you grasped the mic firmly and didn't let fingers or rings scrape the metal shaft, but that's true of most mics.

The DRM85 FlashMic isn't cheap, but you are getting a nice sounding mic, a fine digital recorder with a decent amount of

active the whole time too, whether in 'idle', record, or playback - which is nice. There's also a user-definable pre-record buffer time so that you won't miss the first part of a vital interview. You simply press the red Rec button to make the recording - the operation couldn't be simpler!

I tried the mic in a number of

storage time, and a good software interface for housekeeping and the transferring of files. Together with the excellent build quality and the sheer convenience of the package, the FlashMic provides a very neat solution for the radio journalist.

*jbs*

**“The major selling point for me is that it is just so convenient”**

#### Details

DRM85 Flashmic £699 (+ VAT)

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