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Quick Pick: Primacoustic Recoil Stabilizer

Oct 1, 2008 12:00 PM, By Michael Cooper

In control rooms big and small, ergonomic necessities often impose damaging sonic penalties. We buy the best close-field monitors we can afford, but place them on top of shelves that dramatically degrade their performance.



The Recoil -Stabilizer is -available in different sizes to accommodate many popular studio monitors.

Energy from a speaker causes the shelf it's mounted on to resonate, causing a boost in upper-bass and low-midrange frequencies and marring stereo imaging. In addition, as a monitor's woofer goes through its positive excursion (moving toward the listener), the speaker cabinet will tend to recoil slightly in the opposite direction. The backward recoil robs energy from all the drivers in the cabinet, rounding off transients and compromising stereo imaging and depth.

The solution to these problems is to acoustically decouple each monitor from the shelf — blocking energy transference to the shelf — while providing a solid anchor to prevent recoil. This is precisely what the Primacoustic Recoil Stabilizer (\$84.99 to \$279.99 each) does. Simply place each of your monitors on top of a Recoil Stabilizer to reap the benefits.

SUPER MODEL

Primacoustic currently offers ten different models of Recoil Stabilizers featuring various dimensions and load limits (from 32 to 144 pounds) to accommodate different monitors. (Visit primacoustic.com/recoil-home.htm for specs and to view a chart that recommends which model to use with various studio monitors.) All models are composed of three layers of acoustic materials bonded together. A high-density, open-cell urethane foam (measuring 1.9 to 2.6 inches high, depending on the model) forms the bottom layer that comes in direct contact with the shelf. A laser-cut, 1/4-inch-thick steel deck is fitted to the top of the foam. On top of the deck is an 1/8-inch-thick neoprene friction pad, which prevents a mounted speaker from slipping.

It's the heavy mass (provided primarily by the metal deck) and the antislip surface that distinguish the Recoil Stabilizer from more modestly priced decoupling products such as the Auralex MoPad, which is virtually an all-foam product. Generally speaking, the greater the mass, the more effective a decoupler will be. Heavy mass and an antislip surface also provide the firm anchor needed to thwart monitor recoil. Layering three acoustic materials — each having a different density and, therefore, different resonance characteristics — also helps prevent speaker cabinet resonances from transferring to the shelf the stabilizer sits on.

Most of the models can be ordered to have a top surface that either is flat or has a 5-degree downslope from back to front. The latter design is useful for angling your monitors slightly downward so they're aimed directly at your ears. Model RX5-UF features a 10-degree up-firing slope for use with small monitors placed on a tabletop. Two models are also available for use with midfield monitors and subwoofers, respectively.

MASS EFFECT

I reviewed the RX7a, a 10.3 × 13 × 2.6-inch model weighing 10.8 pounds and featuring a 5-degree downslope. I placed one RX7a under each of my two Yamaha NS-10M Studio monitors, which were situated on shelves of my Omnimax MixStation/02R.

I immediately recognized the improvement in the sound field my monitors produced when used with the Recoil Stabilizers. Bass reproduction was tighter and exhibited none of the upper-bass blurriness that typically plagues shelf-mounted monitors. Localization in the stereo field of different elements of the mix was much more precise. Detail and depth improved significantly. Surprisingly, hard-panned electric guitars also sounded more present. Taken together with improvements in the bottom end, however, that was a plus and did not compromise spectral balance. In comparison tests, the Recoil Stabilizers handily outperformed my Auralex MoPads in all ways except price.

Make sure that you choose a Recoil Stabilizer model whose dimensions match the real-world footprint of your monitors as closely as possible. This will vary depending on whether you align the monitors vertically or horizontally. For example, the RX7a was too narrow in width for optimal use with a horizontally aligned NS-10M, but Primacoustic offers the RX9, which is designed for using the monitor in a horizontal position. To get the least amount of resonance effects, the entire cabinet's base must be damped by the Recoil Stabilizer's mass.

ON SOLID GROUND

Adding Recoil Stabilizers to a setup using high-end monitors is a no-brainer; the expense will be

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only a fraction of what the monitors cost. The relative cost becomes more of an issue, however, when using them with budget-priced close-fields. But whatever the monitor's capabilities are, the Recoil Stabilizer will let you hear its full potential. This is by far the best-performing product of its kind I've reviewed to date.

Value (1 through 5): 4
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