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Primacoustic KickStand Mic Boom Isolator (\$90 list, \$75 street)

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VERSION 6

But does it really work? There's only one way to find out...

www.primacoustic.com

by *Craig Anderton*

Acoustic treatment is the final frontier for many small studios, as more people realize the crucial effect proper acoustical treatment can have on the recorded sound. Some of this is even migrating to live performance, to provide better sound and separation with instruments.

Primacoustic is a company that specializes in acoustic treatment, and the [KickStand](#) is one of their latest. However, some of these products have the whiff of "snake oil" - how do you really *know* if something is improving your sound, or is the improvement just wishful thinking?

The company was aware of this when they launched the [Recoil Stabilizers](#), which are basically speaker isolation pads. The president of the company himself called it a "dumb-ass" idea on a Harmony Central video when he was trying to explain how it works, because it's just so simple and low-tech. Yet he claimed all kinds of advantages, from better imaging to a tighter low end - just the kind of subjective qualities that bring up images of people insisting that drawing a line around the edge of a CD with a green Sharpie gives a "more open, transparent, organic sound."

So he did something smart before launching the Recoil Stabilizers: He sent out beta units to a bunch of prominent engineers, producers, and reviewers, without saying anything other than he had a new product, and would we evaluate it and see what we thought. He didn't really make any claims, and just left it up to us to figure out what it did.

Interestingly, I heard an immediate, obvious difference - nothing even remotely subtle. I wrote back saying I heard much better stereo imaging and a tighter bass (there's a [white paper](#) on the Primacoustic web site about why this happens). But what's interesting is that everyone else made the same observations independently. Snake oil? Not at all.

ENTER KICKSTAND

That long-winded introduction is to explain that with the KickStand, the claims were even more nebulous, and the "snake oil" factor even more possible. KickStand is basically a special-purpose mic holder designed to sit on the floor, and mic kick drums (although it also works well with guitar cabinets and various other instruments - there's more [applications](#) info on the Primacoustic site). The object is to isolate the mic from floor vibrations to give the cleanest possible recording. But how do you actually prove or disprove that it works as advertised?

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Fig. 1: The KickStand in action, miking a kick drum. The metal plate is on the top, the foam is on the bottom...simple.

Well, keep reading for the answer, but first let's look at the construction. This is another "dumb-ass" idea as it's just a 3/8" metal plate, folded back to create a lip with a hole where you can screw in a mic clip or boom extension. The plate sits on an oversized foam pad, which in theory provides the isolation. All this should be obvious from looking at Fig. 1.

The concept is not unlike the Recoil Stabilizers: Use foam to provide acoustical isolation, then add the metal plate to prevent sway at the mic itself. Just as the extra mass seems to improve speaker transient response, it works in reverse here to promote better transient response at the mic, as it's not wobbling around.

TESTING, TESTING

Well as you've probably figured out, here at HC we go the extra mile – whether it's deep analysis of an audio [interface](#), or frequency response graphs of mic modeling in the Line 6 XD-V70 wireless mic [Pro Review](#) – to find out whether what a manufacturer says is hype or real. But, verifying the KickStand performance presented a unique challenge. After some thought, I came up with a solution. For the "control," I'd mount the mic on a tripod sitting on the floor, then compare the mic output to the same mic sitting at the same place on the floor, but using the KickStand.

Obviously the floor beneath the mic had to move. I tried using a back massager with strong vibrations and held it against the floor, but the unit itself generated so much noise that the noise was the dominant sound, regardless of whether mic was on the tripod or the KickStand. Back to the drawing board.

As luck would have it, though, part of the studio has a section with a floating floor. The floor board had a sufficient amount of flex that I could get it to move up and down by pushing on it hard. I thought that if this could be done predictably, and without generating noise, it would actually be a better test because if the KickStand could reduce low-frequency thumps, that would minimize problems due to hi-hat and kick drum pedals, lead guitarists prancing across the stage, and the like.

I stood on the floating part and, keeping my feet on the floor, bent from the knees and moved up and down (sort of like a mild squat thrust). This shook the floor a reasonable amount, and was easily reproducible – my height and weight were not going to change during the course of the review! Best of all, the process made virtually no noise.

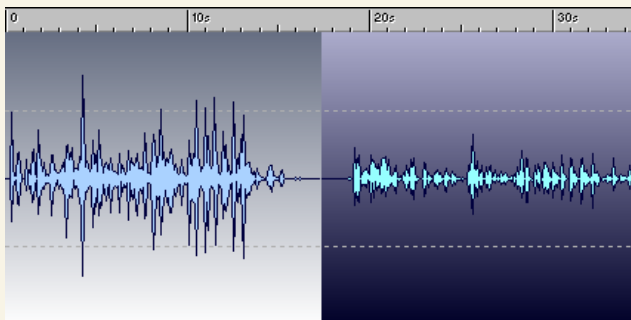


Fig. 2: Recording with a tripod vs. recording with KickStand.

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Now look at Fig. 2, which shows a recording of the mic with tripod (left) and with the KickStand (right). Yes, I was as surprised as you probably are: That's a *major* difference. I measured the average RMS power of each sample, and found that the version with the KickStand reduced noise by about 8dB.

So, mission accomplished. I was able to test the KickStand's isolation perhaps not with total scientific precision, but with enough predictability to find out what I needed to know: This really works. If you're miking kick drums, for [about \\$75](#) KickStand is a great addition to your toolkit.

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