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Primacoustic Recoil Stabilizer Nearfield Monitor Platform

Thanks to physics, metaphysics, or both, the Recoils improve acoustic imaging, focus, and depth perception.

by Tom Jung, 05.15.2008

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When I first heard about the Recoil Stabilizer I thought, "Right—yet another foam pad for speakers." but a friend of mine (whose ears I trust) told me it was the most exciting thing he saw demonstrated at AES in New York last fall. With that kind of approval, I ordered some for review—one per each of my three SLS PS8R ribbon monitors.

Features

The Recoil Stabilizer is made from three basic components. First, a high-density urethane foam layer isolates the speaker from a meter-bridge or stand; this is designed to decouple the speaker and reduce vibration-borne resonance to the area below the speaker, like many other foam pads.

Next is where things get different: a heavy laser-cut steel plate is added to the mix, sandwiched between the isolation layer and the next layer, a non-slip neoprene friction pad to keep the speaker from sliding around. The curved front 1/4-inch thick steel plate introduces substantial mass to the overall structure helping to stabilize the speaker. My own monitors have sat contentedly on solid speaker stands for many years without any concern of compromise, so I was naturally skeptical of the Recoil Stabilizers making any real improvement.

When the Recoil Stabilizers first arrived, I placed them on my speaker stands and realized that the ribbon tweeters were now positioned too high at the listening position because of their total thickness — about three inches. One of many the things I like about the SLS ribbon speakers is the vertical dispersion is fairly narrow which keeps floor and ceiling reflections to a minimum. The Recoils are also available angled, so that more directional monitors can be focused in on the listening position. So, in my situation, I decided to build new stands at the correct height in order to make an effective "with/without" Recoil Stabilizer comparison.

This is a little strange: with the Recoils, the speaker is no longer as steady due to the foam used for decoupling; however, it is apparent that the weight, mass and shape of the steel plate assembly is more than enough to compensate for the loss in rigidity. If I had to make a guess, I would choose rigidity over decoupling as a matter of importance, but as it turns out here, I would be wrong. A ratio of 4:1 speaker to Recoil Stabilizer weight is recommended; that is, the speaker should be no more than four times the weight of the Recoil Stabilizer, yet heavy enough for proper loading of the system. This ratio was apparently decided through extensive listening tests, and it is fairly obvious that the folks at Primacoustic have done their homework.

I can remember a time when I would have rejected the idea of such a product, but it seems the older I get the more open I am to a new idea even if the physics do not totally make sense to me.

In Use

After setting up the Recoil Stabilizers on my new speaker stands with the SLS monitors, it was listening time. The height of the speakers was now perfect but the stability still bothered me a little. I started off listening to a project I recorded with Warren Bernhardt on piano, Jay Anderson on bass and Peter Erskine on drums. The best way I can describe the piano sound is this: if it was a photograph, the focus just got sharper. Warren's nine-foot Steinway sounded even more like it was in my room with me, almost like you could reach out and touch it. Jay Anderson's acoustic bass went deeper without losing definition — more often than not acoustic bass extension can result in loss of pitch definition. Peter Erskine's bass drum sounded fuller and fatter than I had heard it before, much more like it did in the room where we recorded. I always felt that I didn't have quite enough in the mix, but now it sounds just right to me. Everything I played improved with the Recoil Stabilizers — it was clearer, offered sharper imaging and focus with more precise localization of instruments within the soundstage. Even depth perspective was better.

Summary

Personally, I don't think that the Recoil Stabilizers should work as well as they do — but hey, what do I know? They come in many sizes, selected for most of the major monitors in use today with the ability to order custom sizes and angles. Average price for smallish monitors is about \$100 each, which makes them an excellent upgrade value. You really have to hear them to believe all that they do so well.

SECOND OPINION: Recoils Good For Golden Eared Masters ... And Everyone Else, Too

The ears have spoken: a notable cross-section of golden-eared and industry-known recording engineers, mixers, and producers have given their official nod to the Primacoustic Recoil Stabilizer. The fact is, even if you aren't exactly sure what

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Fast Facts

Applications

Studio, broadcast, post, mastering, and consumer/audiophile

Key Features

High-density urethane foam layer; a heavy laser-cut 1/4-inch steel plate; non-slip neoprene friction pad

Price

\$100 to \$150 list

Contact

Radial Engineering, Ltd. | 604-942-1001
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you're supposed to be listening for, you will hear an improvement with a couple of Recoils under your nearfields.

For the tech-heads, Primacoustic's in-depth description of the Recoil (at www.primacoustic.com/recoil-detail.htm) will give you the skinny on how it works. Apparently it's pure physics.

I bought a pair of KRK VXT8 powered monitors (pair, \$1598 list) late last year; I had just reviewed them for PAR. They're built better than solid, measured quite accurately in a PAR bench test, and are relatively weighty; I thought they were really great monitors for my needs. Now, they're even better monitors for my needs.

The budget conscious will ask, "Is the Recoil worth its cost?" To find my own answer, I did the math; the pair of Recoils I reviewed is 12.5 percent of the total cost of a pair of VXT8s. I can say that there was, at the very least, a 12.5 percent increase in performance, which is significant enough for me. (Just a thought: political elections are won and lost with smaller percentages. If people are critiquing my tracks on a regular basis, I would prefer a 12.5 percent increase in 'yes' votes on any day.)

They worked well with a pair of Alesis M1 Active monitors, too (pair, \$599 list). They may have even worked a little more magic with the less expensive speakers! (My guess is that the M1 Active's build isn't anywhere nearly as solid as the VXT8. Even if not, these acoustic improvements are due to that physics thing, as mentioned above.)

Left to the best of descriptions, a Recoil Stabilizer's performance sounds something like ... well, stuff like what Tom just said. It will help your speaker become sharper in its delivery of acoustic detail because it actually improves the environment where your speaker physically resides and works.

Best of all, it works with a very wide range (some may say an entire range) of nearfield monitors available today. Thus, you won't have to have all the gold in Mr. Jung's ears to experience the difference between the Recoil and no Recoil. This product really is a good buy and a solid investment in a better monitoring setup

—Strother Bullins

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