



Countryman B2D

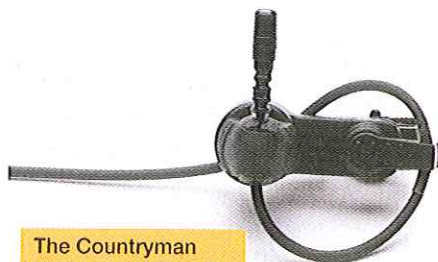
Trying out a recent directional lavalier mic. *by Craig Leerman*

PARTICULARLY FOR THOSE who work corporate meetings and presentations, film and video, and live theatre, lavalier is a primary microphone type. Countryman has long been a “go to” lav provider, noted in particular for the B3 omnidirectional. So when the company offered to hand over a couple of its recently introduced B2D lavs for evaluation, I couldn’t wait to get them.

First, the specs. The B2D is a directional microphone with a hypercardioid pattern. Stated frequency response is 50 Hz to 18 kHz. The capsule is a little bigger than a match head, weighs 5 grams, and comes with a 5-inch aramid-reinforced cable (with detachable connectors) that has a listed breaking strength of more than 45 pounds.

The B2D is available in three sensitivity levels. The B2DW4 is called the standard sensitivity mic and has a level of 6.0 mV/Pascal with an overload rating of 120 dB SPL. This mic is suitable for a variety of uses, and is the model tested here.

The mid-sensitivity B2DW5 is -10 dB down from the W4, with an overload rating of 130 SPL, and it’s targeted for headworn applications, very common in live theater. The low-sensitivity B2DW6 is -20 dB down from the W4, with an overload rating of 140 dB SPL, and it’s a good choice for powerful vocalists such as opera singers. All models are available in black and white as well as three additional colors (tan, beige, and cocoa) designed to match skin tones.



The Countryman B2D in isolation clip.

FLEXIBLE OPTIONS

Both mics arrived at my shop in hard-shell zippered cases with a Velcro strap that secures the mic and cable, as well as a large mesh pouch and smaller see-through storage compartments that allow you to store and organize accessories. When using lavs in a wide variety of applications (as I do), there are a lot of small, easy-to-misplace accessories like clips and windscreens. Each case is large enough to hold two mics and accessories.

Also included with each B2D is a windscreen, protective cap, single isolation clip, and a hardwired cable or cable with a detachable connector system, which is perfect for folks who need to use the mics with different wireless systems (again, as I do). Detachable

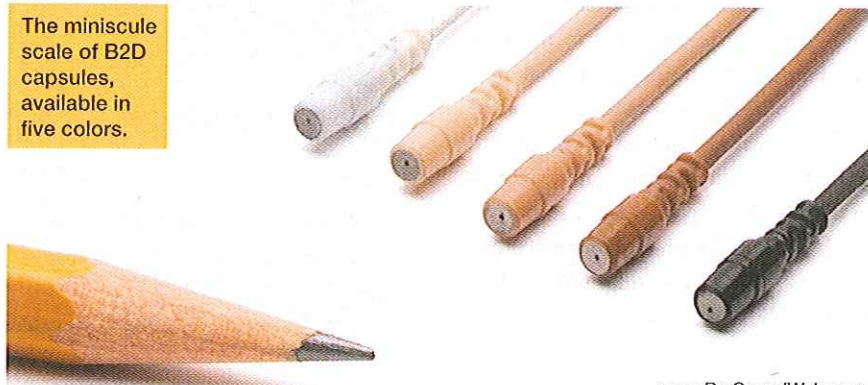
connector adapters are available to fit wireless bodypacks from Shure, Line 6, Sennheiser, Lectrosonics, Audio-Technica, and AKG. The screw-on connector system is quite rugged – I had no worries about it coming apart during use.

The TA4F connector adapters I ordered to interface with my bodypacks are chrome and very durable. A black plastic locking button locks the connector to its respective bodypack. The cable attachment to the capsule is secure, and there’s a molded strain relief. Clear shrink wrap near the capsule end helps reinforce the areas where the cable is clamped into the clip, and it also acts as an isolation sleeve.

GETTING ATTACHED

Even with the windscreen in place, the B2D is smaller than most omni lavs and far more miniscule than any directional lav I’ve seen. A protective cap helps keep dirt from reaching the mic element. It can be removed for cleaning but is needed for correct operation and pattern control. Those who need to hide the mic on actors will appreciate being able to

The miniscule scale of B2D capsules, available in five colors.



remove the cap and clean it instead of trying to clean a grill or capsule body that is one piece.

The clip allows the capsule to rotate a full 360 degrees for ease of positioning. The mic is held in place by the cable in a clamp holder, and this holder then attaches to a recess in the clip's main body. The clip has an extra cable gripper that isolates the capsule from handling noise and provides additional strain relief.

The teeth on the claw portion of the clip are just sharp enough to provide a good grip on just about any type of clothing, but not so sharp that they snag or damage delicate fabrics. As an option, there's also a magnetic clip that uses a backing plate and magnet, perfect for extremely delicate fabrics like silk. Also available as an option is a double clip for mounting an addition mic to serve as a backup, or to accommodate a second mic with a different pattern.

FIRST TAKE

For my initial test, I screwed an XLR adapter connector on a B2D and plugged it into a small mixer with headphones. With the controls set flat, I clipped the mic to my shirt in a position where I would usually locate it on a presenter. It sounded great, with little to zero clothing and handling noise as I moved around and brushed fabric up against the cable and capsule.

The hypercardioid pattern was a little tighter than I prefer for the average presenter, but it wasn't so narrow that it would present a problem. Normally I



The detachable connectors interface to a wide variety of wireless transmitter packs or an XLR input.

place a lav anywhere from 6 to 12 inches from the talker's mouth. The B2D sounded good no matter where I positioned it, even clipped lower on my chest more than 15 inches from my mouth.

Next, I experimented with some placements common to theatre – center of forehead at the hairline (at least where my hairline used to be!), in front of my ear, in my beard, and even on my glasses. It sounded excellent no matter where I put it.

I swapped out the XLR with a TA4F connector and tried it with my Line 6 and Shure wireless bodypacks. The connector fit well and locked solidly in place. Audio quality was again excellent, and the mic had more than enough output to work well with both systems.

IN THE FIELD

Satisfied that the B2D could handle anything, I took my units to a corporate meeting with typical speech presentations, a mix of male and female presenters. I found it easy to use the isolation clip and get the mics correctly positioned. Most mounting positions were

center of chest about 10 to 12 inches below the mouth. Both mics sounded superb, and with little to no coloration of the voices.

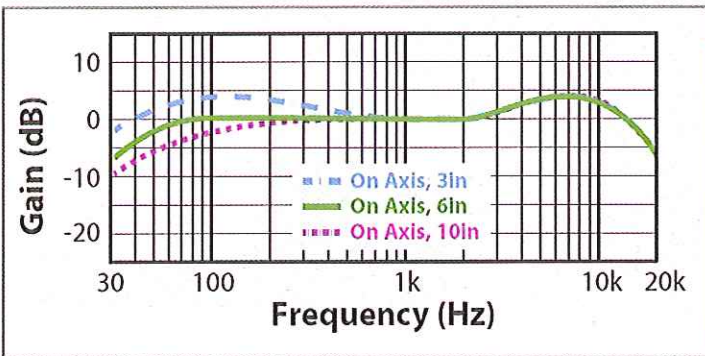
The next gig was a corporate meeting where the presentations would also be videotaped, so in addition to the live feed, I sent a recording feed to video world. Usually at these types of events, the presenters speak at a podium. One of my tricks is to put a separate lav on presenters to capture the recording feed, even if they want to just use the podium mics. It's a way to insure the video folks get good audio even if the presenters have poor mic technique at the podium.

So here, I used the B2Ds instead of my usual omni lavs for the feed, and the video folks were very happy with the results. During the event, one rather tall presenter adjusted the podium mic incorrectly, pointing it at his chest. There was little of his voice in the PA, and I was on the verge of feeding back if I brought up the podium any louder.

Since he was wearing a B2D on his tie for the recording feed, I simply brought it up in the PA as well, avoiding a big problem. And over the remainder of the event, I did an A/B comparison between the two mics, using whichever one for the specific presenter. The B2D ended up in the PA about half of the time, rather than the podium mic.

I've since used these mics on quite a few more gigs, and they've been great. In fact, they're now my favorite lavalier. U.S. MSRP for the B2D is \$650, supplied with a 5-foot cable, carrying case, wind-screen, single isolation clip, protective cap, and detachable connector. The various other accessories noted in this Road Test are available at additional charge. ■

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The B2D frequency response is tuned to be natural and intelligible at a wide range of distances from the mouth.