

# Marantz PMD350

## CD/Cassette player

A two-in-one recording solution provides obvious space saving benefits in the studio. Brad Watts frees up some rack space.

It's always a battle fitting that extra piece of equipment into the studio rack.

Space is even more at a premium when fitting out a rack system for live or touring applications. When it comes to squeezing in both a CD player and a cassette recorder, the job gets even harder. In a studio setting, the CD player and cassette can be tucked away somewhere else, but a touring rack may have to forfeit one item or the other. This is where Marantz have used a fair degree of nous and released the PMD350 Combination Cassette Deck/CD Player. Now I've never been a fan of the 'all-in-one' genre of audio appliances, but this machine definitely addresses the problems encountered when trying to efficiently manage rack 'real estate'.

### First impressions

The unit initially looks like a typical hi-fi cassette player. Finished in black, the first aspect to grab my attention was the permanently attached rack-mounting ears. Normally fitting both a CD and cassette player into a rack would take at best, five units of space, and in the worst case, six units. This box is three units high so you could feasibly use four rack spaces (leaving one for ventilation) and still be one or two spaces better off. That being the most obvious benefit, let's have a look at the layout of the machine.

From the left is a power button, an eject button for the cassette mechanism, and a three position dial for the headphone monitoring source. The dial switches between monitoring either tape, CD or both at once. Then we see the cassette transport. The transport will play in both directions and can be set to play infinitely, both sides or one side before stopping. To the right of the cassette mechanism is the fluorescent-style display section. The display shows input level, and includes a tape counter, along with a time and track number readout for the CD. Here we also find switches for the selection of Dolby B and C type noise reduction. The cassette also has varispeed of  $\pm 12\%$ . Another nifty feature is 'ALC' or 'Automatic Level Control'. This allows you to load the machine with a pre-recorded CD and a blank tape, and then with one push of the 'Dubb' button the unit will scan through the CD, searching for



peaks, and then sets the cassette recording level to suit. Once the CD has finished its scan the unit proceeds to record to cassette. I tried this out and found the scan time for a full length CD to be about one minute before the cassette went into record. One shortfall of this system is that the CD will then place four second gaps between each CD track, so for continuous gapless CDs you'd have to resort to manual level setting. Another minor annoyance was the lack of a cassette cueing feature.

Below the display section resides the CD transport, again with  $\pm 12\%$  varispeed and buttons for selecting different time displays such as total remaining time, track remaining time and track elapsed time. There's an A-B button for looping a selection of the CD, and a program button for re-arranging the track order. Last but not least, a repeat button is offered for repeating the whole CD, but sadly not for repeating single tracks. You can, however, use the A-B looping feature for that task if need be.

Off to the far right of the unit are the very useable and prominent transport controls for each transport. The tape controls are set out as FF left, Play Left, Pause/Stop, Play Right and FF Right - very logical and intuitive to use. The play controls light with a green LED arrow to display the direction of play. Similarly, the CD controls are set out in a logical fashion: Rewind/Cue, Play/Pause, Forward/Cue and Stop/Eject. Again the play button lights when the CD is in play mode, or flashes when in pause. Interestingly, skipping to the next or previous track puts the CD into pause mode. I initially considered this a problem, until I started seriously using the unit. In fact, it is very handy in a studio situation to be in pause before you start playing the next track. I often find myself flitting between tracks on a CD when

in 'studio mode' and this feature results in a lot less button pushing, and provides a breathing space before you launch into the next track selection.

Beneath the transport controls is a large record level knob and a recessed balance control (adjustable with a screwdriver). I would prefer to see separate left and right level controls, as opposed to the more domestic arrangement of level/balance.

### Plugging it in

The rear of the PMD350 is where the professional tag earns its salt. In its standard configuration the unit features left and right mic inputs on 6.5mm jacks, tape I/O, CD output and combined CD/tape outputs, all as RCA connections. An RCA S/PDIF output is provided for the CD (only operational when the CD is set to normal pitch by the way). Additionally there are RCA connections for wired Marantz remote controllers and connections for cascading several units together for multi-cassette duplication duties. Then there are two 6.5mm jacks for controlling start and stop for each transport using any simple on/off footswitch.

That's the standard configuration. To take things even further into the 'pro' realm you could install the balanced XLR kit. This kit provides balanced XLR I/O for the cassette and XLR output for the CD, along with an AES/EBU digital output. A switch will swap the unit's input between the balanced XLR and the unbalanced RCA inputs. With more ins and outs than you can poke a

patch lead at, the PMD350 will interface with most installations you're likely to encounter.

### Workhorse

Despite my personal niggles, the PMD350 stands out as a real workhorse unit capable of interfacing with numerous professional situations, ranging from studios through to PA systems and duplication houses. The space saving implication is reason enough to invest in this unit, let alone the comprehensive I/O options. I'd rate the build quality as a few notches above a semi-pro DAT player, while the CD player sounds very good indeed. I'm not really a fan of cassettes these days, but the two cassettes I recorded (using the ALC system) produced results you'd expect from a good to high quality cassette transport. For pro applications or even the committed domestic market, this unit definitely deserves a look.

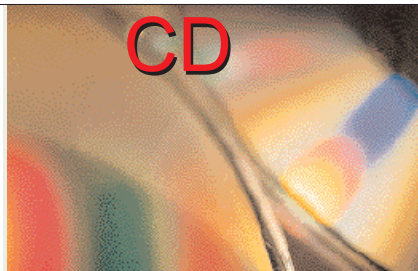


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