

COLEMAN AUDIO M3A DAW MONITOR

Like many small studio owners, I don't use a true mixing board. Instead, I use the Pro Tools virtual mixer along with a MotoMix digital mixer worksurface attached to the MIDI ins and outs of a Digi 001. It's convenient, cheap and saves me valuable space. The downside? For a year, I didn't use the DA converters on my Apogee PSX-100 but settled for the sound I got from connecting my monitors directly to the Digi hardware.

One day I got curious and decided to connect my monitors to the PSX-100 DA outputs, figuring I could control the volume using an auxiliary buss on Pro Tools.

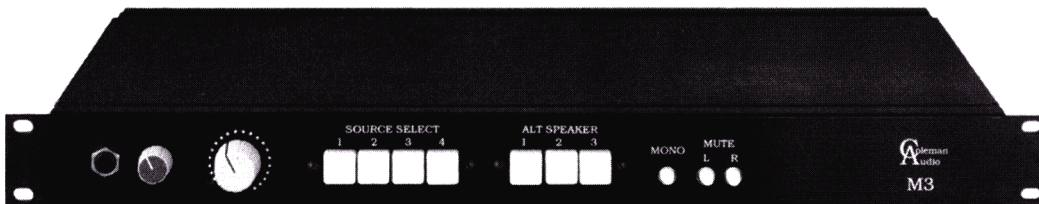
Enter the Coleman M3, a 1U rackspace control-room monitor section. The M3 includes four stereo inputs and three stereo outputs on balanced XLR connectors, and each I/O is selectable from plastic pushbuttons on the faceplate. It includes a main volume control as well as a headphone output with its own separate volume control. Three smaller buttons allow you to choose between mono mode, left speaker mute, right speaker mute and any combinations of the three. When I set up the M3, I ran my DA outputs into source 1, and another output from an Alesis Masterlink CD player into source 2.

Coleman says he originally created the unit for use in video facilities, so extras such as the headphone output were added later to appeal to the audio market.

Furthermore, although the unit allows you to run three outputs to three different sets of speakers, in its standard configuration, it won't run more than one output at a time. That means if you want to send sound to your monitors and a headphone amp simultaneously you need to patch the DA outputs into the headphone amp first, then patch the outputs of the headphone amp into the M3, then out to the speakers. Fortunately there's an internal mod to make output 3 fixed and always on, which makes it easier to feed the aforementioned headphone amp or a set of meters. The M3 comes in two versions, the M3A and the M3PH. The first is active, the second passive; and while the latter carries a higher price tag and cleaner signal, I haven't noticed any ambient noise from my active version. What I have noticed is a much better sound quality, as well as the convenience of multiple sources at the push of a button.

(M3A \$750.00 MSRP, M3PH \$850.00 MSRP www.colemanaudio.com)

-Mike Jasper, www.deceptivesound.com



To test this theory, I set the volume at a safe level (about -36db) and played back an acoustic guitar track. The results surprised me, loud beyond belief. I lunged at the faders and turned the level down to -60db, not exactly the setting you'd want to use during a mixdown. I realized what I needed was a simple device-- something with XLR I/O's and a volume control-- so I could monitor from the DA without blowing out my monitors or my ears. If it had another another output for a headphone amp so much the better.

I use a Macintosh, which has never been able to play CD's through anything but the built-in hardware, so being able to play discs through my studio monitors was a definite bonus. Unfortunately, after running the unit for three weeks, the left channel of the M3 gave out, and I had to send it back to Coleman Audio for warranty repairs. Glenn Coleman, owner of the eponymously-named company, completed the repairs, at no cost and returned the unit quickly. It's been three months now, and so far the M3 has been running without a glitch.

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