

I bought a new Tascam MD-CD1 off eBay for about half list price. The unit LOOKS nice, and feels decently built. It appears as a decent quality home deck with a rack adapter. I basically got the unit as it's probably going to be the last CD/MD deck ever made, as well as to augment my MXD-D400 deck when I need to do fast Atrac-R high speed digital dubs (I almost always record analog through a Carver tube CD player, but that takes a bit of time to do it to perfection). So, basically, the Tascam's point is to be a dubber; everything else is just lagniappe. However, there are some strange quirks with the unit, and one completely unforgivable idiotic JOKE of a design flaw disaster that makes the unit useless.

The first thing you notice is that the manual is not clear nor specific regarding features such as record levels, why there are two ways to set the analog record level, why there are two ways to set the dubbing digital level, why high speed dubbing ignores these settings, etc. There is only ONE display on the unit; you have to toggle between the two sides to read the display for either the CD or the MD. Annoying. Same goes for the output; you have to select which one you want, even if you just hit "play" on the MD side. Annoying. The menus are not user friendly or intuitive to use in any way. When you adjust one parameter, you have to start from scratch and enter the menu every time you want to adjust something. And, the knob is ABOVE the display, so you can't read the display when you adjust the dial; you have to hold your arm consciously out of the way. Ergonomically, the deck looks good, but it's not user-friendly.

The CD player side has its own playback volume adjustment buried in a menu, and it is performed in the digital domain. What they don't tell you however is that this changes the record volume on the MD side but only in regular speed dubbing. This, however, turns out to be a GREAT thing (see below), since when you DO wish to adjust the recording level when dubbing from CD to MD, you CAN adjust the record level under the MD menu, however you can NOT monitor the level in ANY way! There is NO record/pause function when dubbing that also allows you to enter the menu to even set the record level. Going by logical protocol, a user would enter the recording mode menu on the MD side, select "Rec Level" and be able to see the levels while in dubbing standby mode and adjust them accordingly. No can do. There is no way to send the CD player signal to the MD side and thus see the record levels if you do not have the recorder in "dubbing" mode. But, once you enter dubbing mode, you can't access the menu to adjust anything. If you adjust the record level beforehand, your recordings WILL reflect how you set that level, but there is no way to tell how to set them in this method, since you'd have to do as you would with a 2 head cassette deck and literally play back what you just recorded to see if the levels are clipped. BUT, with MD, you CANNOT SEE a clipped/over indication once recorded. Adjusting the dubbing record volume is seemingly hit-or-miss when set by the conventional method that most people would ever THINK to use. Absolutely useless design. This is ABSURD that this is designed by such idiots...

Now, to the aforementioned CD side playback volume adjustment. Since this adjustment is in the digital domain, and this adjustment affects the level that the MD records at, the way around the ridiculous problem mentioned above is to simply adjust the CD playback volume as if you are adjusting record levels and leave the MD record level side at 0.0db. This way, before you dub, you can actually SEE the CD's actual levels while playing (the clipping/over indicator does work when adjusting the CD playback output) and your MD's will be recorded at the proper volume. I have no clue what complete idiot designed this thing. Tascam has truly lost it.

The MD's analog input level control can be both controlled by the "Rec Level" adjustment in the menu and ALSO by the input knobs on the front panel. Makes no sense. If the input volume knobs are all the way down, you still get signal recorded. Idiotic. Why did they think they had to re-design and complicate

such a simple thing as record level control? There are 5 ways to adjust it on this unit depending on what you are recording. And, the analog inputs are NOISY AS HELL. Not as bad as my Onkyo MD-133 deck but nowhere near the quietness of Sony ES decks by ANY means. It's ok for casual recording, but I would NEVER use it to record anything of importance through its own noisy analog circuits.

The deck does have a neat gimmicky "key change" feature for CD playback, and in normal speed dubbing mode, however you set the "key" or the "pitch" of the CD is how the MD gets recorded. The pitch control could at least be useful in some cases, so I guess the unit has a plus.

Now, for the clincher...NO MATTER HOW YOU DUB (NORMAL OR HIGH SPEED) THE ***** UNIT INSERTS BLANK SPACES BETWEEN DUBBED TRACKS!!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!!!!! There is NO setting to change this. I dubbed a few CD's both regular speed and normal speed, and sure enough, this worthless *** adds a second or so of SILENCE between songs!!! This has nothing to do with any Auto Cue settings, Auto Space settings, dubbing modes, or settings of ANY kind. ABSURD! AGAIN! IDIOTIC! AGAIN! I thought something might be wrong...then looked in the manual. This is NORMAL operation for this unit! The manual states to physically connect the CD digital output to the MD input with an optical cable to avoid this! WHY????? WTF????!?!?!?!?!?!?! If I'm going to do that, then WHY HAVE AN "ALL IN ONE" MD/CD UNIT???. If you connect the unit in this way as instructed by the manual, you lose ALL the benefits of a dubber...no high speed, no quick EASY dubs, no lack of hassle...this is the POINT of a dubber! To dub the EXACT CD as easily and quickly as possible! The fact that this unit inserts blank spaces basically makes this unit USELESS for anything unless you KNOW beforehand that the spaces will be acceptable on a particular CD that you may happen to be dubbing! Needless to say, I'm appalled by the absolute incompetence in designing this thing. Tascam, you're officially in a coma. The plug's about to be pulled. Your time has passed.

Oh why oh why Sony did you have to abandon minidisc? NO ONE seems to know how to make these things work intuitively and sensibly as you once did...the Onkyo's leave out important features and editing precision, Tascam is run by a bunch of clueless designers who never USED a physical recording device in their lives, and everyone else gave up years ago.

Sorry, everybody...but the last bastion of a decent quality near hi-end home MD deck/dubber turned out to be a major dud that's pretty much useless in its desired purpose. It always made me feel better about MD that "at least you can still get a hi-end quality deck from Tascam since Sony gave up" but I've sadly been ripped for a very expensive deck that doesn't properly do what it was designed for. But, it looks good. Oh well.