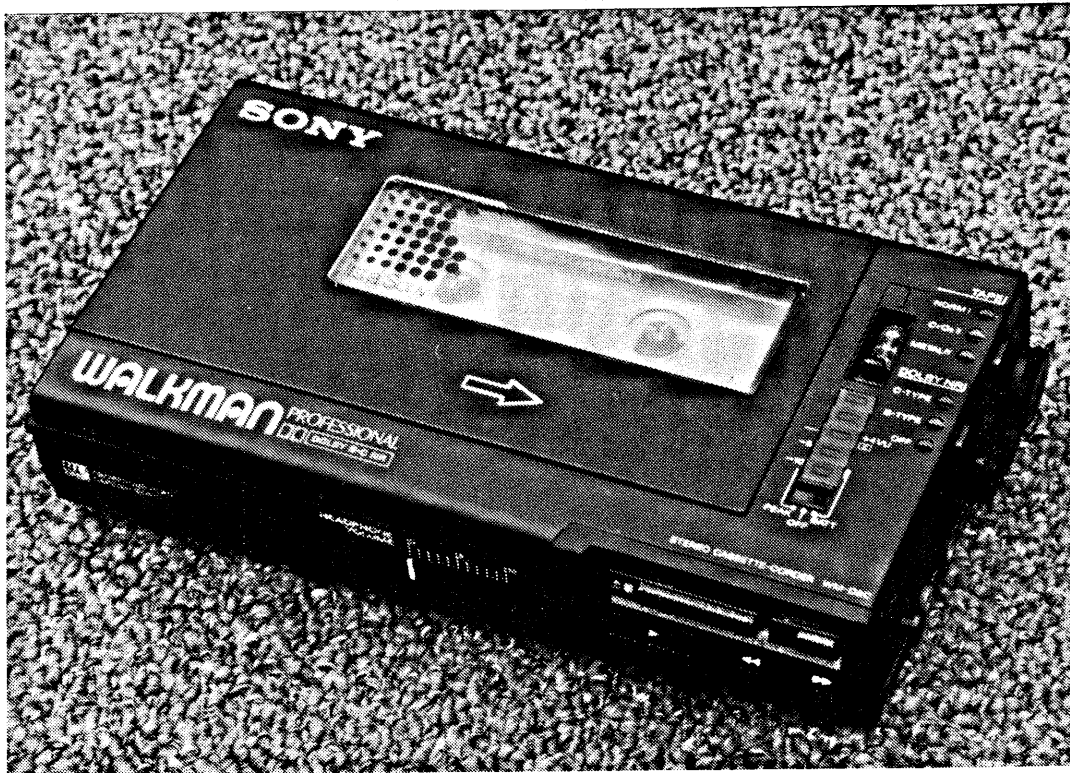


THE SONY WALKMAN PRO WM-D6C

Chuck Mitchell



What type of cassette deck would you expect to find integrated into a \$20,000 stack of hi-fi gear? Perhaps the Nakamichi Dragon or a Studer-Revox studio deck would come to mind. It may be a revelation that the Sony Walkman Professional WM-D6C compares favorably with these high-end cassette machines and appears in many exceptional domestic stereo systems. What will interest the recording DXer is that the D6 achieves this level of performance at a quarter of the cost and size of its esoteric contenders. It is a reliable and rugged device with the functions necessary for premier DX recording at home or in the field.

The D6 is a proven performer in the hi-fi realm for rendering stunning duplications of albums, compact discs and FM stereo broadcasts. In portable situations it is a valuable tool for recording broadcast interviews, live music, environmental ambience and wild life sounds. I have used the D6 for most of these applications and can verify its high level of audio reproduction and versatility. If you are searching for a deck to use for the home shack or DXpedition site, the Sony D6 should be a consideration.

The D6 is very compact: a mere 7-1/4 x 1-5/8 x 3-3/4 inches including projecting parts. It weighs 1.41 lbs with its internal battery pack of 4 AA cells. The shell of the unit is primarily metal with a flat black finish. Features on the Pro have been reduced to a minimum. There are no auto-reverse or memory options. The tape transport control buttons are not soft touch servo-controlled types. They require a firm push to engage a particular function. One touch record is accomplished by engaging the record button on the right side of the deck. The unit will shut down totally when your cassette comes to its end. While the function controls are not as conveniently laid out as larger tape decks, they are quite rugged and function smoothly.

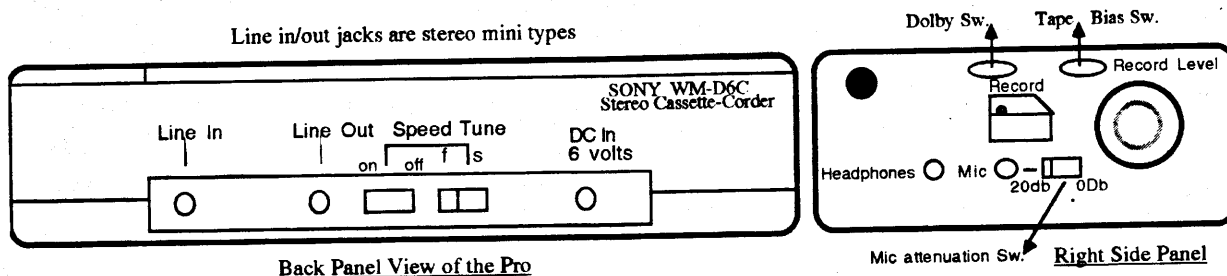
The D6 does not incorporate an automatic level control circuit for record. Input gain is manually varied by a control on the right side panel. Input gain is measured by a string of calibrated LEDs on the top panel. It is easy to keep the record level in the safe zone for most applications. Peaks of +3 to +6 are acceptable. The Pro's electronics have consistently handled off scale meter peaks during unpredictable live music recording situations. I have rarely detected distortion during playback of these intense peaks. The lack of an ALC circuit should not be considered a negative point.

Aside from portability, the Walkman Pro offers other features useful to the DXer. Located on the back panel of the deck is a pitch control. This will yield a speed variance of plus or minus 4%. That small amount of speed change can be a big help in extracting information from a fast talking announcer. There is also a counter located on the top panel.

If you plan to make copies of your tapes it is advisable to switch on the Dolby noise reduction. Both Dolby B and C types are available. Dolby C yields the greatest noise reduction. S/N ratio with C is @ 71 db. It will also produce a recording with exaggerated high frequencies when played back on a deck without Dolby C. The use of Dolby B is still effective, but not as annoying when played back on a non-Dolby deck. I generally switch on B to keep the tape noise down when using a normal bias cassette for everyday DXing.

Input and output jacks are located on the back panel. They are 1/8" stereo mini types. The wiring scheme between the receiver(s) and the D6 will depend on your requirements. The listener can feed one receiver to both tracks via a "Y" adapter. This method will yield a monaural recording. When DX conditions are favorable, the listener can take advantage of the Walkman Pro's stereo tracks by recording two receivers, tuned to different stations, at the same time. (Some DXers like to tune one receiver to a time signal station and pipe it into one track as a time reference.) My recording scheme sometimes involves feeding the NRD-515 audio into the left track and the Drake R4-B audio into the right track

As with any stereo tape deck, you can feed the individual audio outputs of two receivers, tuned to the same station, to the left and right tracks. By experimenting with different antennas combinations, you may be able to improve the intelligibility of a weak DX station.



The Walkman Pro is an obvious choice for the DXpedition fanatic. Its measurements make it possible to even be carried on a backpacking excursion. The D6 can be powered by its internal replaceable AA battery pack or an external 6 volt source. Four AA alkaline cells will power the unit for about 4 hours in continuous record mode. A 6 volt lantern battery could power the D6 for several more hours. The Pro comes with a fitted soft case. A good investment for field use is the "Travel Satchel" from the Eddie Bauer Company. It measures @ 6" x 2-1/2" x 9" (WHD) and contains several pockets for extra batteries, patch cables and a microphone. The case is constructed of heavy cordura and is padded.

One can monitor with headphones or an external stereo amplifier and speakers. If the latter method is used, one can pan left or right with the balance control to choose the desired signal. I use a compact pair of amplified speakers made by Aiwa. Each speaker has a volume control that allows me to fade up the desired track if a split receiver system was employed. A simple home brew switching box or adapters will be necessary if you choose to single out the left or right track and monitor it in both sides of your headphones.

The Walkman Pro has performed well over the past three years with a variety of cassette types. Maxell XL II-S or Denon HD-7 chrome cassettes are good choices for premium quality recording. The D6 will also accept metal tapes. Sony HF series normal bias cassettes have served my general purpose DX recording needs. Regardless of your tape preference, don't forget to clean the tape path and heads every ten hours of use. Use a cotton swab saturated with a professional head cleaning solution. The solution should be a type that is not damaging to plastic or rubber. It is also beneficial to demagnetize the heads occasionally.

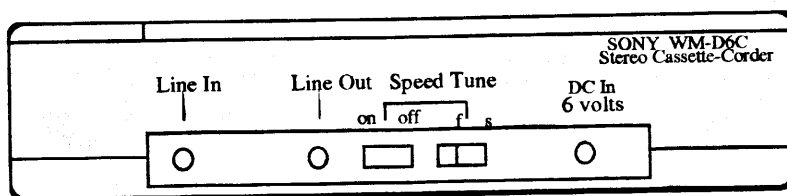
Sony's frequency response specifications in the manual appear to be only average for a deck of this reported quality. I had the D6's frequency response calculated and found that it plays back within plus or minus 3 db from @ 30 Hz to @ 18.0 KHz. (Test tape was a Maxell XLII-S. The test tones were injected at a level - 20 db.) Don't be too concerned. As with shortwave receivers, specs can't give a complete view of how a rig will sound in actual use. I have not found a cassette deck that sounds noticeably better than the D6. My comparison listening tests include professional studio decks like the Nakamichi MR-2 and Tascam 122.

These decks report superior specs on paper but don't sound as good as the diminutive Walkman Pro. The bottom line apparatus for testing a deck is the ear. If it doesn't sound better, it isn't better.

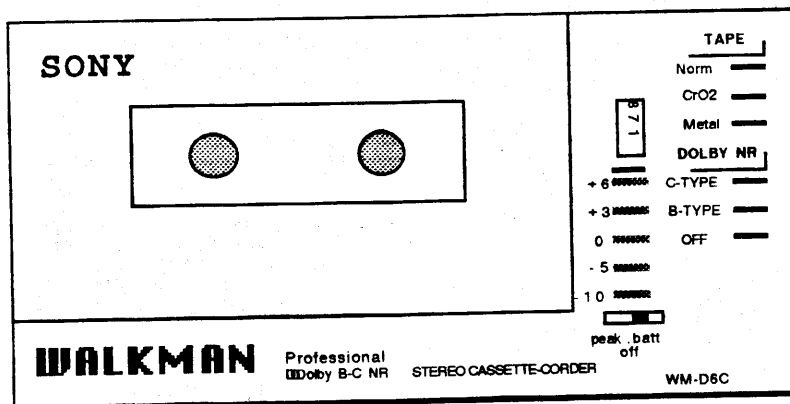
Supplied accessories may vary with dealer. The D6 should be supplied with stereo headphones, patch cables, soft case and batteries. Some dealers supply it with an AC adapter or stereo microphone. In any case, the most important item in the purchase should be a warranty valid in your country! A grey market D6 purchased from a discount dealer may not be provided with a warranty. The Pro can be difficult to locate in the audio marketplace. Below is list of dealers in the U.S. that may stock the D6 or accessories.

Possible sources for the WM-D6C	Telephone
Foto Cell, New York, NY	212-924-7474
47th Street Photo, New York, NY	800-234-4747
Hi-Fi Buys, Nashville, TN	615-320-1600
Smile Photo, New York, NY	212-967-5900
Bi-Rite Photo & Electronics, New York, NY	800-223-1970
The Eddie Bauer Co. (For the "Travel Satchel")	800-426-8020

The cost for D6 can vary from approximately \$295.00 to \$400.00. The lower price positions the Pro in the same range as larger Marantz stereo portables and AC only domestic hi-fi decks. The combination of portability, ruggedness and high performance make the WM-D6C a worthy candidate for the recording DXer's needs.



Back Panel View of the Pro



Top View

Abbreviated List of Specifications From the WM-D6C Manual

Wow & Flutter	.04 % WRMS (NAB)	Line out level	.25V >4.7K Ω
Speed tuner variations	+ or - 4%	Headphone output	30 mW + 30 mW
Frequency response (Chrome tape/Dolby off)	40 Hz - 15 K + or - 3 db	Power requirements	6 V dc, 4 AA cells External 6Vdc jack
Total Harmonic Dist.	.9% w/a Sony Metal	Size (WHD)	7-1/4 x 1-5/8 x 3-3/4" 181 x 40 x 95 mm
Mic input	.25mV Low Ω	Weight	1.41lbs 640 g
Line input	77.5 mV 47K Ω		