

Interphone F5MC Bluetooth Intercom

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INTERCOM SYSTEMS HAVE COME a long way in recent years as the technological pace of integration heats up, and single devices offer ever more functionality. Interphone's new F5MC Intercom is one such high end system, boasting several worthwhile features (intercom, phone control, FM radio, streaming music, and aux wired input) with a comprehensive text-to-speech multilingual voice prompt guiding the rider through each individual menu on the fly. I set out for a few months on the road to verify if the FM5C's performance lives up to Interphone's advertising claims.

Key Features

The FM5C is packed with features to enhance its functionality, including...

- Full duplex intercom with up to 4 way pairing, using digital signal processing for enhanced sound clarity
- A2DP / AVRCP compatible wireless streaming stereo from MP3 player or mobile phone
- Built-in FM radio receiver with RDS functionality, 8 memory presets, and automatic muting for incoming calls
- Compatible with most motorcycle GPS systems such as BMW Navigator V
- Bluetooth Version 3.0

Installation

As shown in Figure 1, the FM5C is quite compact, measuring approximately 3.5" long by 1.75" high by 0.8" deep and weighing a scant 1.94 ounces. The housing itself is rated to IP67 (fully immersible in water up to 1 meter) for weather protection. Everything required for installation in either a full face or open face helmet is included, right down to the screwdrivers for the sturdy mounting

clamp's Philips head screws. Likewise, the speakers are wafer-thin, and should fit nearly any helmet with no interference. Microphones for both full face and open face helmets are included.

On The Road - Hits

I tested the FM5C over a wide range of riding conditions during the 2015 riding season and came away mostly impressed. Sound quality from the helmet speakers was excellent. The full duplex feature means no "push to talk" is necessary. Background noise is absolutely minimal, so you can keep your channel open and just speak when you feel like it. In fact, it's very similar to speaking landline phone to landline phone, in that you can "talk over" over one another simultaneously. The functionality of the Interphone in this regard is as good as it currently gets.

Pairing with Apple Iphone, Samsung Galaxy phone, BMW Navigator V, and other bluetooth devices went smoothly. If paired direct with Iphone, we were able to achieve voice activation of Siri, enabling remote control of the phone's various

related functions. The instructional videos on Interphone's YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/user/interphoneusa/videos) helped with this process. For rider-to-rider communication, the two FM5Cs I tested arrived already paired to each other, which was a time saving bonus. The unit's "Anycom" feature allows pain-free pairing to other major intercom brands as well.

The FM radio function features stellar reception and RDS capability, so the comm searches for a station and not just the frequency. The voice prompt handily announces the frequency and station name information to the rider, so it's very easy to search around for your favorite stations while moving. There are 8 FM memory presets available, and the radio function is auto-muted if a call comes in.

The battery life is phenomenal. The advertised claim of 12 hour talk time was verified, and incredibly, the batteries still had charge left over! Interphone claims 700 hours standby time, so no worries if you leave the FM5C on for a few days by accident. Charge time from flat is three hours, and the comm's onboard charge port also



Figure 1.

doubles as an auxiliary wired input.

On The Road - Misses

There are four areas in which the FM5C could use improvement, chief among them the unit's lack of a jack for in-ear headphones. Experienced riders know the value of wearing earplugs, which dramatically reduce the chances of permanent hearing loss and incurable afflictions (such as tinnitus) resulting from prolonged exposure to excessively high levels of sound (wind noise, engine noise, etc.) For this reason, over the course of my entire riding career, I have always used ear plugs, and for communicators or music, a set of noise-blocking speaker earphones such as Etymotic. Frankly speaking, as great as the FM5C's helmet speakers are, comparing the sound clarity of any helmet speakers to a good set of noise-blocking speaker earphones is like comparing an outhouse to the Taj Mahal. So in this case, with no speaker jack to allow earphones on the FM5C, the rider has three choices: Ride without hearing protection,

use standard ear plugs which will seriously degrade sound quality from the helmet speakers, or wear the NoNoise Motorsport ceramic filter earplugs (tested in *BMW Owners News* September 2014, page 118.) Obviously, the NoNoise plugs are the best balance between hearing protection and sound clarity given the choices. Nonetheless, the inability to use in-ear speakers on an intercom is a non-starter for many riders, myself included.

My second complaint is ergonomics. The buttons on the comm unit itself are simply too small. With fall or winter gloves on, it is almost impossible to press the "-" button (closest to the rear of the unit) by tactile feel alone, which is frustrating while in motion. More pronounced buttons would easily solve this issue.

A third disappointment was in the realistic range, which in my experience never exceeded 0.4 miles in full duplex mode. This is less than half of the advertised range of 1.3km, and this despite my testing on fully charged batteries in an unrestricted

rural area. The range only drops from there when the rider transitions to more urban settings. As the useful range is exceeded in duplex intercom mode, the rider hears a rapid clicking sound before the comm cuts off entirely. On the plus side, once the comms are within range again, they automatically reconnect.

Finally, I found the automatic volume control quite finicky. It always seemed to be either too loud or too quiet for any given situation. Luckily, this feature can be disabled with help from a YouTube video (www.youtube.com/watch?v=KMRK9U_69OE) which affords the rider full manual control of the volume.

Overall, the Interphone FM5C is a fine intercom with many worthwhile features, as well as a few niggling faults which will hopefully be rectified on the next generation. For more information, visit www.interphonewireless.com. MSRP: \$399 (for 2x FM5C comms - single comms are available for \$239) ©

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