

# Versatile Olympus VN-4100PC Digital Recorder

By Ken Reitz KS4ZR

**D**o you ever wish that late night TV chat shows were on during a time of the day when you aren't asleep? How about those shortwave radio shows that you always seem to miss when they air? Or what about trying to stay up all night to catch those shows on the AM band with guests who seem like they're from other planets? What's happening in your town on the scanner while you sleep?

I've heard from many monitoring enthusiasts over the years who have concocted different schemes to record the things that happen in the RF spectrum while they are asleep or are at work, but the Olympus VN-4100PC digital recorder could be the best answer to what they've been missing.

## ❖ Feature Rich Recorder

Here's a super lightweight (just 2.5 ounces with batteries) digital recorder that you can use to record off-air radio or TV; your favorite programs off your computer – or from any other source, for that matter. An easy to use, built-in timer makes sure you catch the radio shows you've been missing. You can play back through external speakers on your stereo, through your computer's sound card, through your car stereo, or any other radio that has a mini phone jack input.

With up to 144 hours recording time, you can accumulate a lot of old time radio shows, BBC World News, or anything you can find on the web for future playback.

This recorder comes with software that lets you manage what you've recorded via .wav files. But, you don't even have to have a computer to record and listen to shows. Use it the way you used to use a small cassette recorder, but without the hassle, weight and mechanical crankiness of cassette recording.

This recorder also has a built-in microphone that lets you record interviews; use it as a personal note-taker (up to 144 hours of your private thoughts!), or to record business meetings. I've used this unit to record interviews using a homebrew lapel microphone I made

for less than \$5 from an electret mic element, a length of RG/176 coax and a mini-plug. The person interviewed simply slips the recorder into a shirt pocket and attaches the mic to his shirt. The audio is perfect.

On playback, an index button lets you tag parts of the broadcast or interview of interest so that, playing it back again, you can skip over the fluff and get to the parts you want to hear. A "goof-proof" erase button is easy to use, but not so easy that you can accidentally erase what you've recorded. A bright red LED indicates that the unit is recording, and a bright green LED indicates playback.

The 4100PC has a built-in microphone jack that can be used as I described above or for input from your radio's speaker, computer sound card, or any other device that has the same type output. A very small, built-in piezoelectric speaker is useful but makes listening a strain. I found that earbuds (not included) are more useful, as they give better audio fidelity and listening privacy.

Most functions are done through an easy-to-understand menu, which is displayed on a 1" square LCD screen. Playback volume level, fast forward, and reverse are done using a four-way rocker button.

There are three levels of playback: slow (to facilitate dictation), regular, and fast (to get quickly past parts you're not interested in, but still maintain intelligible audio). Separate buttons for record and stop help you set up to record quickly.

## ❖ Last Word

Other more expensive Olympus models include rechargeable batteries and use a recharge circuit through the USB port to charge the batteries when hooked up to your computer. The more expensive models also feature volume level controls and stereo input and playback. Those features may be worth the extra money, but if you're primarily listening to shortwave, scanner or old time radio programming, you won't have much need for stereo.

As for battery consump-

tion, I've found that with moderate use throughout the year, I've only had to change the batteries once. And, for recording level control, adjusting the output level at the audio source keeps the unit from over-driving the audio when recording off-air.

There are also cheaper Olympus models available but, they have less record time, no PC connection and no external microphone connection. If those features aren't important for your recording needs you could save money by buying the cheaper models.

But, for my purposes, the VN-4100PC was just right. This recorder is available from Radio Shack and numerous other storefront and online outlets, retailing anywhere from \$45 to \$62. It comes with a full year warranty on parts and labor.

## **SPECIFICATIONS:**

Recording length: 144 hours  
Batteries: 2 AAA (not included)  
Dimensions: 4" long, 1.5" wide, 3/4" thick  
Weight:

2.22 oz. w/o batteries,  
2.5 oz. w/batteries

## **Features:**

Built-in microphone,  
External microphone jack,  
Earphone jack,  
USB port w/cable



*Olympus VN-4100PC digital recorder stores up to 144 hours on batteries that seem to last forever. (Photo courtesy Radio Shack)*

## Longwave Resources

✓ **Sounds of Longwave** CD or Audio Cassette (please specify) featuring WWVB, Omega, Whistlers, Beacons, European Broadcasters, and more!  
**\$13.95** postpaid

✓ **The BeaconFinder** A 65-page guide listing Frequency, ID and Location for hundreds of LF beacons and utility stations. Covers 0-530 kHz.  
**\$13.95** postpaid

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## Books by Ernest H. Robl:

*THE BASIC RAILFAN BOOK*

*UNDERSTANDING INTERMODAL*

*THE POWDER RIVER BASIN*

Detailed descriptions at

<http://www.robl.w1.com>