COMPUTER music PERFORMANCE Award

Line 6 [PC] [MAC]
Pod Studio UX2 £172

The UX2 hardware remains the same, so is the new Pod Farm software enough to take this package to the next level?

cm DVD
ON THE DVD
AUDIO DEMOS
Check out our demo tune for a sampler of Pod-powered tones

> The new POD Studio line from renowned amp modellers Line 6 comprises the GX, UX1 and UX2 bundles, with hardware identical to previous versions, but with a black fascia instead of red. You get 24-bit/96kHz performance, two guitar inputs (one with a volume pad), two XLR mic inputs, a pair of assignable VU meters and a headphone socket.

Down on the farm

The older UX2 bundle came with the GearBox software, but this has been superceded by the all-new Pod Farm, which has a vastly improved GUI showing a 'carousel' of the units. You simply drag the unit you want into the signal chain display below. Like GearBox, some units can appear in multiple locations in the chain. Time-based effects can now be synced to the host DAW, but the most enticing new feature is the ability to use two amp setups in parallel.

Pod Farm lacks the MP3 player that Gearbox had, but it's unlikely you'll miss this feature. Overall, the look and functionality is now more tailored towards the guitarist, and while the modelling technology is basically the same, it's easy to see why Line 6 made these changes.

Amp-wise, you get 23 guitar and bass models, including emulations of Fenders, Marshalls and Mesa/Boogies, as well as versions of Line 6's hardware amps. For effects, there are 29 units paying homage to classics like the MXR Phase 90 and Ibanez Tube Screamer. There's also a free downloadable pack of 35 effects in the FX Junkie pack, and six mic preamp models.

Line 6 have long been leaders in amp modelling and you can hear why here. We're particular fans of the JCM800 emulation, which provides a heavy sound with bags of clarity, as do the crunchier Fender-style sounds.

At first glance, it seems that there are literally hundreds of presets; however, some of these feature amps that aren't included in the Pod Farm package – see boxout for further info. While you can select a substitute amp, you can't help feeling like you're missing out. Another small problem is that the tuner found in standalone mode is absent from the plug-in.

By including POD Farm, the UX2 has, as Line 6 intended, become more guitar focused. The new software, combined with pro hardware features like XLR input and phantom power, makes the UX2 a great buy for those looking to upgrade their basic setup, not to mention a strong first-time investment. **cm**

Contact Line 6, 01327 302 700
Web www.line6.com
Info iLok version, £80; GX, £80; UX1, £114

System requirements

PC P4 1.2GHz, 512MB RAM, 1GB HD space, XP SP2/x64 or Vista 32/64

Mac G4 800MHz, 512MB RAM, OS X 10.4.6

Test system

PC HP Pavillion 2.8GHz processor, 1GB RAM, Windows XP

Alternatively

Novation nio 2|4
cm122 >> 8/10 >> £165
Includes amp sim plug-ins, but they lack Pod Farm's quality

Native Instruments Guitar Rig 3 Kontrol Edition
cm120 >> 9/10 >> £450
The wide range of tones and included foot-pedal/interface makes live use viable

Verdict

For Great Line 6 tones
'Crunchy' sounds are particularly good
Interface isn't only for guitars
Extra FX bundle great for crazy sounds
iLok version is rather good value

Against No Tuner in plug-in mode
Some presets need upgrades to work

While not being a total overhaul, this refinement of Line 6's proven product line hits its mark more precisely than ever

8/10

Increase your package

You can buy further amp models for the Pod Studio UX2 in the shape of downloadable 'model packs'. There are four available: Metal Shop (18 amps), Collector Classics (18 amps), Power Pack (20 amps, 26 effects) and Bass Expansion (28 amps) – prices vary from $50 to $100, with deals allowing you to buy multiple packs at a discount. A fifth pack, FX Junkie, is free with the UX2 and is used in the middle part of our audio demo.

While users may experience a bit of initial disappointment at not having access to the full amp range straight away (and, therefore, not being able to make full use of the presets), the price isn't too bad and owning the full set puts you in command of a truly comprehensive arsenal.

Finally, while the version of Pod Farm bundled here requires the hardware to be attached to work, you can buy the software on its own in iLok-protected format for £80.