

Tascam DP-32 Portastudio | £899

Portastudios are a Tascam speciality and the DP-32 could be the most powerful yet. But can it still deliver in a world run by DAWs? **Jon Musgrave** investigates

WHAT IS IT?

Tascam's latest flagship Portastudio

CONTACT

Who: TEAC UK Ltd
Tel: +44 (0)845 130 2511
Web: www.tascam.co.uk

HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 An all-in-one solution
- 2 Integrates well into Reason workflow
- 3 Colour LCD screen

EXTRAS

RC-3F Footswitch
£45

For recording projects, the DAW route is an attractive proposition – flexible and scalable – but once you start

to plug all the bits together, it's actually a bit of a minefield. At the other end of the spectrum is the Portastudio concept: self-contained, predictable and often considered too basic for serious production tasks. However, while other manufacturers have come and gone, Tascam have stuck with the concept, incorporating the latest technology to maximise performance, robustness and scale. And they've turned out some units capable of very credible results.

The DP-32 is the latest Portastudio addition, following quickly in the footsteps of the slightly more compact DP-24, and it's now their flagship Portastudio device. It uses SD (512MB to 2GB) or SDHC (4GB to 32GB) memory cards for audio data storage,

but also incorporates CD-R for mastering and USB for data transfer to and from computer. The default layout includes eight mono and 12 stereo tracks, although you can set the 12 stereo tracks to mono if you like, and recording is at 16 or 24-bit and 44.1kHz or 48kHz. Each track gets a dedicated fader plus Select and Record buttons. 'Select' ties in with the main display and control panel (see below) which includes physical knobs (rotary encoders) for track EQ, panning and effects sends, as well as access to other functions. Meanwhile 'Rec' doubles as a solo or mute button when used in conjunction with the global mute and solo buttons above the transport.

The DP-32 has eight inputs on XLR/jack combi connectors, and all are equipped with phantom power activated in two banks of four. Input 8

(H) can also handle high impedance guitar sources (there's a selector switch on the back panel). All inputs can be freely routed to any tracks or to the stereo output, giving the DP-32 a theoretical maximum of 40 channels at mixdown. Although to achieve this maximum, 12 of these would have to be stereo. In terms of outputs, there's a main monitor output on balanced jacks, main stereo output on unbalanced phono, and one front-mounted headphone output. You also get physical outputs for sends 1 and 2. Rounding things off are a mini USB socket, MIDI in and out for MIDI sync, and a front-mounted mini jack for Tascam's RC-3F pedal remote.

Control screen

The DP-32 includes a small but hi-resolution colour LCD screen, which provides feedback and control of many of its functions. The main homescreen includes two pages – Time Line and Meters – offering good overall feedback of track usage, levels, routings and song position. The function buttons to the left – Assign, Mixer, Dynamic and Effect – access additional features, and combined with the four function keys, jogwheel, cursor buttons and dedicated rotary controls mentioned above, help you access all the relevant parameters.

Further settings and features such as song management, SD formatting, preferences and the tuner are accessed via the Menu screen.

The use of combi input connectors, an external PSU and SD cards for audio





storage keep the DP-32 both compact and light, but the buttons, faders and controls still feel pretty solid. Even so, the lack of digital connectivity and one headphone output is slightly annoying. We also thought the included USB cable was absurdly short.

Track timer

The DP-32 uses a song-based filesystem and it's at this stage that you select sample rate and bit rate. With your song set up and selected you'll also get an idea of how much recording time you have available from the Remain indicator in the top right of the screen. This hours and minutes counter indicates overall track time, so if you select multiple tracks to record it will update accordingly based on your current song length.

Routing signals is pretty straightforward and with the Assign page active, you can either use the

Effects Allocation

The DP-32 includes five processing blocks: EQ, Dynamics, Send Effects, Guitar Effects and Mastering Effects. The three-band EQ is freely available on all source inputs and track playback so you can 'EQ to tape'. The Dynamics block has four mutually exclusive processors: Compressor, Noise Suppressor, De-esser and Exciter,

available for inputs but not recorded tracks. The Send Effect is hardwired to send 1 and you can choose one of three effects: Reverb, Delay or Chorus. Meanwhile the Guitar Effects is a four-effect chain: Amp, Compressor, Effect (phase, flange, chorus, tremolo, auto wah and delay) and Noise Suppressor. The overall input DSP is shared

allowing the following combinations: 8 Dynamics, 0 Guitar Effects; 2 Guitar Effects, 0 Dynamics; 1 Guitar Effect, 2 Dynamics. You can also use the Guitar Effects on one recorded track. Finally, to round things off we have the Mastering Effects, which includes three-band EQ, multiband compressor, normaliser and dither.

to eight virtual tracks for each track, allowing easy stacking of multiple takes. However, while this is a positive experience, DP-32's editing capabilities are less well implemented. Editing functions (cut, copy, paste, silence,

and for me its strengths clearly lie in tracking, which is why the basic monitoring features are a bit disappointing. The included EQ, Dynamics and Send Effects are simple but sound great, allowing you to quickly

taylor your signals at source. If you can get your head around the DSP sharing limitations, the Guitar Effects are also a nice touch, perfectly useable

and, again, can be recorded if you wish.

Although it has the facility to master your mix and burn it to CD-R, the option to transfer the track audio to your computer and edit or finish the process in a DAW is what really matters here, and for me that's what makes the DP-32 still relevant in this DAW-dominated world. **FM**

Winning features are its compact size and simple design, and its strengths clearly lie in tracking

Source and Select buttons, or cursor around the screen manually. It's worth noting that you can route one source to more than one destination track.

The DP-32's one headphone output receives the same monitor signal as the main monitors, which is somewhat restrictive. However, if you really need a separate feed you could use send 2 and hook up an external headphone amp. Next up, the included effects routing allows you to apply the Dynamics block, EQ and the Guitar Effects block (see Effects Allocation box) prior to recording, which is a nice touch.

With signals routed and monitoring sorted, the nitty gritty of recording with the DP-32 is amazingly simple, and with Rehearse, Auto Punch (and foot pedal control if you buy their proprietary one), there are various ways you can fine-tune your ways of working.

As far as multiple takes are concerned, you can actually create up

track clone and so on) all rely on setting in and out edit points using the transport locators, and although you can zoom in and use the scrub wheel to view waveforms of each track, it feels too clunky for careful editing of your master recordings.

However, the DP-32 has one rather useful trick up its sleeve in the form of AudioDepot. This allows you to import and export WAV files via a shared folder on the SD. Once you transfer this to your computer (either on the SD or via USB) you can then load it all into a DAW. All your track files are rendered from zero so it all lines up, and you're ready to edit, mix or both.

Box of tricks

The DP-32 delivers an interesting combination of features, and in typical Portastudio style, attempts to give you everything in one box. Winning features are its compact size and simple design,

SPECS

Recording media: SD 512MB to 2GB, SDHC 4GB to 32GB
Inputs: 8 balanced jack/XLR combination
Input impedance: Above 22kΩ line, 2.4kΩ
Main outputs: unbalanced phono (stereo), balanced jack (monitor)
Output impedance: 200Ω
MIDI: In & Out
USB support: Windows XP, Vista or 7; Mac OS X 10.2 or later
Dimensions: 514 x 340 x 104mm
Weight: 6.2kg

ALTERNATIVES



Tascam DP-24
£699

If you don't need the extra track count, save your cash and get its cheaper sibling.

www.tascam.co.uk



Zoom R24
£429

It has a less impressive work surface but the SD-based R24 packs in a lot of features.

www.zoom.co.jp

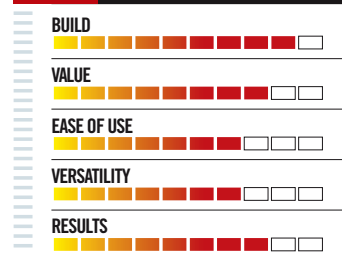


Boss BR-1600CD
£1,150

This 16-track hard disk-based system includes up to 256 virtual tracks, eight mic inputs and pitch correction, amongst many other features.

www.roland.co.uk

FutureMusic VERDICT



Compact, solid and reliable but in a world full of DAWs the DP-32 feels somewhat restrictive.