M-Audio M-Track Solo and Duo
from £40

Want a basic, reliable interface? **Jon Musgrave** thinks one of these could do

CONTACT WHO: M-Audio **WEB:** m-audio.com **KEY FEATURES Frequency Response:** 20Hz to 20kHz **Signal to Noise Ratio:** 109dB **A-weighted Instrument Input Impedance:** 1MOhm **Mic Gain:** 0 to 54dB **Line/Instrument:** -10dB to +44dB

In recent times, new audio/MIDI devices from M-Audio have simply carried the Air 192 badge and for a while, it wasn't entirely clear whether the long-running M-Track name was being retired. But lo and behold, two new M-Track devices have just landed on my desk and the label lives on. M-Track Solo and Duo are entry level audio-only interfaces. Both are class compliant USB-powered devices and have 2-in 2-out connectivity with up to 24-bit or 48kHz operation.

Their feature sets are slightly different but underlying specifications are very similar. Solo includes one mic/line channel with switchable phantom power and one line/instrument channel. The main outputs are on unbalanced RCAs and the front headphone output is on an 1/8" mini jack. Both outputs share a single output level control. A front switch selects between just the output stream (USB) or minimum latency monitoring option combining the inputs (mono'd) and the output stream (Direct).

Duo has a pair of mic/line/instrument inputs with global switchable phantom power. The outputs are on balanced 1/4" TRS jacks, the headphone output is a 1/4" jack, and there are separate headphone/output level controls. Like Solo, Duo also has zero latency switching to combine input and output streams, but with both mono and stereo (hard panned) options.

Each package includes the interface, a one metre USB-B to USB-A cable and instruction manual. There's also a decent bundle of software, which you can download once you've registered the device on M-Audio's website. Titles include the AIR Music Tech Xpand!2 synth, Eleven Lite guitar amp sim and 20 Avid plugins, as well as Pro Tools First M-Audio Edition and MPC Beats. Despite the amazingly low price, both units look well made and although the boxy design is basic, the black finish, recessed rubberised knobs and functional selector switches feel solid. The rubber feet stop the units slipping around on the desktop and both are pretty light, so suitably portable.

With class compliant drivers, getting started is as simple as plugging up and making sure the device is selected in your audio software. Nevertheless, there's no USB-active LED on either interface and no output meters, so there's no obvious way to see everything's working, which is annoying. That said, you do have two-tone (green/red) input/clip-level LEDs for each input so setting up a healthy but clean signal level is easy enough. Plus, you also have an orange phantom power indicator.

Both interfaces use M-Audio's Crystal Preamp design, and this provides you with plenty of clean neutral gain (up to 54dB for mic and up to 44dB for line/instrument). This is great for lower output dynamic mics or weedy passive guitars. Even so, I found both interfaces sounded pretty nasty when they overloaded, and so I kept well away from the red clip LED. In terms of drivers, on Mac OSX and at 44.1kHz I achieved a roundtrip latency of 9.4ms with a 64 sample buffer. This clearly isn't class leading, but is perfectly workable.

M-Audio's no nonsense interfaces are simplicity itself, and although it's a slight shame that there's no MIDI, at this price who's complaining? And, weighing up the options, for the sake of an extra tenner I'd definitely go all out for the more flexible M-Track Duo. FM

THE PROS & CONS

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Very affordable

Decent preamp design

Light and portable with solid build quality

Integrated minimum latency monitoring

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No MIDI connectivity

No USB or activity indicator

FM VERDICT

8.8

Suitably portable with a decent spec, these latest entry level M-Tracks offer fantastic value