

Mackie D8B v3

The original Mackie D8B vision finally realised? Brad Watts checks.

Mackie set a cat among the pigeons when the company released its D8B console with great fanfare late in '97. In a market dominated by more established digital consoles, the Mackie won many friends by offering more expandability for its price than any of its competitors.

But while much was promised at the release, a lot of the features only became available as Mackie released system software upgrades. The latest, v3, brings many new features to the board along with some tasty extras.

Aesthetically the system seems similar to previous versions until you notice the extra tabs at the bottom of the display: a 'plug-in' tab for the newest batch of DSP options, for example, and an expanded 'faders view' which lets you view 48 faders as opposed to 24 on Version 2. Sticky menus have been introduced in line with other operating systems, along with 'drag 'n' drop' file management and contextual right-click menus. The mix edit window has been totally revamped to bring it in line with the HDR24 recorder, and a new history list enables up to 999 levels of undo depending on how much RAM you have installed – older D8Bs with only 16MB installed can still remember up to 100 history points.

One of the more exciting additions is the Universal Effects card. Unlike the standard MFX card that ships with the D8B, the UFX card comes with TC Reverb pre-installed and hosts effect plug-ins designed by some of the other great names in the DSP world such as Drawmer's ADX100 for frequency conscious dynamics control, the ever-popular Antares Autotune for vocal pitch correction, TCWorks' TCFX II (which provides reverbs from the renowned TC Electronic M2000), and the exceedingly funky Massenburg EQ.

The D8B sports slots for up to four UFX and MFX cards. Four cards will provide 16 mono effects through to eight stereo effects but make sure you have at least 32MB of RAM installed for this number of cards.

Users will also be pleased to know that individual channel compression now has a 'soft knee' toggle – about time and infinitely more useable. The release curve of the compression algorithm has been changed from logarithmic to linear, offering a far smoother release curve, and input keying and sidechain compression is also possible. Key input can be derived from channels one to 48, buses, effect sends and returns or the stereo digital inputs, while auxiliary sends can now be set individually as either pre or post fader (but unfortunately are still always post dynamics and EQ).

Channel Routing is a thoroughly welcome addition and means the output of any channel can be routed to the channel strip of any other channel. Channel cross-patching lets you replace a channel strip with any other channel

strip so your entire mix can be driven from one bank of faders and you don't have to flip back and forth between banks. Single channels can also send multiple direct outs. This total flexibility allows effects or even dynamics to be inserted anywhere, and it functions like a virtual patchbay of the calibre seen in half million dollar consoles.

Adding further versatility is Midi I/O mapping for all channel strips and master parameters including the transport. Bi-directional control makes the system brilliant for the many folk using this board alongside Midi+audio recorders such as Logic Audio and ProTools. Midi faders and buses can also now be part of a virtual group, blurring the line between virtual and real sources further still.

Surround aspects haven't been left out either. Depth of centre control has been included along with an LFE control for each channel. Bus and track assignment names have also been corrected to suit the surround conventions and a new 72-channel surround overview has been added.

Installation of Version 3 is simple and requires only two floppy disks. In true Mackie fashion the upgrade is free and available from the company's website as either Mac or Windows disk images. Although, be aware that when you upgrade, there are certain v2/v3 compatibility issues.

Expectations are always high when Mackie release a new product (some might say, unrealistically high), and I think it's fair to say that the original D8B release left a few 'true believers' feeling a little disgruntled. Credit to Mackie, though, Version 3 is a huge leap forward for D8B users and really opens the gate for third party plug-ins. Such power at such a price is remarkable compared to many of the competing products and, with Mackie's commitment to end users, I can see the D8B becoming a formidable digital console standard for years to come.



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Price

• Free v3 upgrade.

