

MIX & MATCH

AWARD MB10 MATCHBOX DI/EQ/SPEAKER SIMULATOR

The makers of the popular Sessionmaster guitar preamp looked at the DI box concept and thought it could be much more useful: the result is the Matchbox, a DI with a difference. PAUL WHITE strikes up a beautiful relationship...

Award's Matchbox is a rather stylish, multi-purpose, battery powered DI box with a difference. It works with both line and instrument level signals and has additional features for use with electric guitars in the form of tube-amp voicing, variable high frequency EQ and speaker simulation, the latter being based on the circuit used in the popular Sessionmaster Recording Guitar Preamplifier.

The idea is that, as well as its role as a normal DI box, the Matchbox has additional modes specifically related to recording guitar. It is particularly useful in the home studio, where it eliminates the need to mic up loud guitar amplifiers, and though it contains no effects or overdrive circuitry of its own, it works equally well for processing guitar effects pedals or the output from a guitar preamp to provide a 'miked up' sound suitable for recording direct to tape. During the course of the review, I also confirmed the manufacturer's claim that the Matchbox can double as a microphone preamplifier for high impedance microphones and, with the addition of a mic matching transformer, even low impedance microphones. This could be particularly useful for Portastudio users who have machines without channel insert points as it provides a means to insert a compressor between the mic and the recorder input; the mic feeds the Matchbox, the Matchbox feeds the compressor and the compressor feeds the recorder.

The unit is powered from a standard 9v, PP3 battery which is automatically switched off when the input is unplugged, but may also be powered from an optional AC adaptor. Line, microphone or instrument sources are connected to the (unbalanced) jack input socket, though speaker level sources are not catered for. The gain control optimises the input level, while the overall sensitivity is switched using the Line/Instruments switch. There's no peak level warning LED, but if distortion becomes evident, it's easy enough to back off the gain control a touch.

Guitar EQ

When the guitar EQ is switched in, the Treble control becomes active, the equaliser circuit itself apparently being based on the passive designs used in valve guitar amplifiers. Effectively, it is a three-band EQ where the low and mid settings are preset and just the treble is variable, but there's more to this circuit than just EQ, as it actually simulates the voicing of a typical guitar amplifier, adding brightness and low-end punch. The EQ may be used either with or without the speaker simulation to produce

a wide range of clean guitar tones, ranging from mellow to glassy bright, and the fact that the unit has a high input impedance means that the original tone of the guitar is not compromised in any way.

For overdriven sounds such as effects pedals or preamps, switching the speaker simulator in provides a warm sound that remains bright without being fizzy. It should be stressed that the Matchbox doesn't actually create overdrive effects, but the speaker simulation means that ordinary distortion pedals can be recorded with no problem. In practice, the simulation is very close to the sound you'd expect from a miked amp, though a little fine tuning with your desk EQ can be used to customise it still further.

The output from the Matchbox is at line level on a stereo jack socket which can be used balanced or unbalanced; there is no XLR output or provision for phantom powering.

In Use

For my tests, the Matchbox was plugged directly into my mixing console line input, and aside from its obvious versatility, I was impressed by how quiet the circuitry was, even with quite high amounts of treble boost added.

In practice, the unit functioned perfectly as a conventional DI box for use with bass guitars and so on, but it also proved to be gratifyingly flexible when used with 6-string electric guitar. Without using any other effects or processors, a very acceptable clean guitar sound is achievable, while the addition of a compressor yields a very classy result indeed. It also works well with acoustic guitar pickup systems, bass guitars and even keyboards, where the speaker simulator can be used to create more of a warm, analogue sound from digital instruments. A side-benefit is that the high frequency noise generated by some MIDI synths is reduced by the speaker simulation filtering.

Given that this is a very modestly priced unit with so many potential uses, I can see it becoming very popular in both home and professional recording studios. It costs little more than a regular DI box, yet can make a world of difference when recording electric guitar and also comes into its own as a universal problem solver for matching levels or adding EQ to sounds. ☘

FURTHER INFORMATION

- Award Matchbox £89.95 including VAT.
- Award Design, Box 3, Basingstoke, RG24 9QA.
- ☎ 0256 477222.
- ☎ 0256 817687.



AWARD MATCHBOX

PROS:

- Includes speaker simulator.
- Very low noise.
- Useful guitar EQ.

CONS:

- Can't run from phantom power.

PERFORMANCE:

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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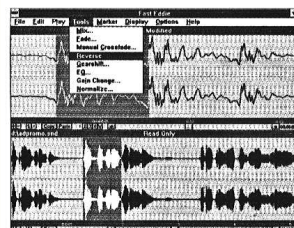
VALUE FOR MONEY:

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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Award Design's Stuart Ward will be happy to help with any further info you'd like on the Matchbox or the Sessionmaster guitar preamp. Just call him on 0256 477222, fax on 0256 817687, or write to him at the address at the end of the review.

WHAT'S NEW

By Steve Oppenheimer



▲ DAL FASTEDDIE

Digital Audio Labs announced *FastEddie* (\$199), a simplified WAV file editor. The program lets you do sample-accurate, nondestructive editing in one screen while viewing the original file in another.

Features include bass and treble EQ; cut, copy, and paste; custom fades, with linear or log curves; up to 300 markers per window, which can be set "on the fly"; waveform mixing; and zoom in/out. You can reverse a waveform, change playback speed by percentage, and normalize gain. The Edit History feature lets you retrace your last ten edits.

Included with *FastEddie* is *Playlist Editor*, which lets you play WAV files sequentially, or split a file into regions for remixing. Also included is *Sound Catalog*, a utility that lets you trigger WAV files by point-and-click, computer hot key, or MIDI from within any *Windows* sequencer. Digital Audio Labs; tel. (612) 473-7626; fax (612) 473-7915.

Circle #401 on Reader Service Card

▶ PEAVEY PCX 6

Peavey is offering the PCX 6 (\$2,799) and PCX 688 (\$3,299) sampling keyboard workstations. The PCX 6 has a 61-key, unweighted keyboard, while the PCX 688 features the same 88-key, weighted action found in Peavey's DPM C8 master keyboard. Both keyboards send



Velocity and Channel Pressure and are housed in C8-style, hardwood cases. The sampling features include 32-voice polyphony (sixteen stereo voices); 2 MB of dynamic sample RAM, expandable to 64 MB; 16-bit, 44.1 kHz recording; and full DPM SP sample-library compatibility. One MB of static sample RAM can be added. You can resample layered sounds and sequenced loops through the two onboard multi-effects processors. A 240 x 60 graphic display is provided for editing, looping, crossfading, etc.

The PCX instruments include 10 MB of ROM-based PCM waveforms, which can be combined with user samples in Programs, Performances, and drum kits. The user interface lets you orga-

nize instrument sounds, samples, and Performance setups in folders without copying and pasting, and macros help ease programming.

The 16-track sequencer can store up to 200,000 events. The audio inputs allow stereo recording to RAM, and the two digital audio tracks can be synced with the sequencer tracks. The audio tracks can be cut, copied, and pasted.

The PCX units have two SCSI connectors, a bay for an internal hard drive, a pitch wheel, two mod wheels, four programmable sliders, two footswitch jacks, and a CV pedal jack. Peavey Electronics; tel. (601) 483-5365; fax (601) 486-1278.

Circle #402 on Reader Service Card

▶ AWARD MATCHBOX DI

Award has introduced three specialized direct boxes. The Matchbox MB10 (\$160) is designed for electric guitars and includes a treble control; defeatable, preset EQ; and preamp with defeatable G12T speaker simulator. The Matchbox MB12 (\$160) emulates a classic tube bass amp and offers bass-guitar versions of the MB10's features, including a 15L speaker simulator.

The Matchbox MB11 (\$160) for acoustic instruments has a Mega-Z input stage that provides impedance-matching. The unit's Pre-Shape feature emulates near-miking and filters the mids. The Hornsaver protects high-frequency P.A. horns by adding treble in the direct-injection box for more "bite," rather than adding treble at the source (which stimulates feedback and amplifies pick-rattle and other acoustic noises).

All three Matchboxes have

unbalanced, ¼-inch inputs and simultaneously available, balanced, ¼-inch and XLR outputs.

A universal DC power system automatically senses and switches polarity and lets you use any AC/DC adapter that outputs 9 VDC to 30 VDC. The Matchbooks also operate on a 9V battery. S/N ratio is rated at 84 dBm (1 kHz @ 0 dBm output). Sound Enhancements, Inc. (distributor); tel. (800) 639-4668 or (708) 639-4646; fax (708) 639-4723.

Circle #403 on Reader Service Card

