



WHAT IS IT?
 A Saffire PRO 24 with Focusrite's own Virtual Reference Modelling technology for simulating different acoustic spaces through headphones

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HIGHLIGHTS
 1 VRM is effective and a unique proposition
 2 Offers independent routing of VRM and 'regular' output signals
 3 The excellent Saffire PRO 24 interface with 'extras'!



Focusrite Saffire PRO 24 DSP | £300

Saffire's impressive PRO 24 interface has just gained a unique DSP feature – VRM. *Jono Buchanan* puts on his cans and gets a-mixin'...

SPECS

System requirements
Mac: OS X 10.4.11 or later, FireWire 400 port, PowerPC G4/1GHz or higher, 512MB RAM (1GB or more recommended), 1024x768px display
PC: Windows Vista or Windows XP SP2 or higher, FireWire 400 port, Pentium or AMD with 1GHz or higher, 512MB RAM, 1024x768px display
Dimensions: 215 x 45 x 220mm
Weight: 1.6kg

Barely five minutes seem to have gone by since I was telling you about Focusrite's Saffire PRO 24 FireWire

interface. You might remember that I was hugely impressed by this classy little half-rack unit, providing 16 inputs, eight outputs, two high quality Focusrite mic preamps and an impressive software control panel, which keeps signals routed and balanced while recording. So, how come a near-identical box is sitting in front of me now – groundhog day? Not quite.

The Saffire PRO 24 DSP is, operationally, a mirror image of the regular PRO 24 with one notable exception. The 'DSP' model comes with Focusrite's VRM technology, which stands for 'Virtual Reference Monitoring'. You know how we technologists are always encouraging

you to check your mixes in as many different places and on as many different systems as possible? Well, VRM is designed to help you do just that – but with the bonus of never having to remove your headphones. This review will focus exclusively on VRM, so grab a copy of *FM217* to read my thoughts on the Saffire PRO 24.

Mix convolution

Multiple modelled headphone environments are possible because the Saffire VRM uses technology a little like that in Focusrite's own convolution compression and EQ treatments as found in the LiquidMix, to provide simulations of a series of speaker sets in different environments. These range from specific 'studio-based' near-field monitors to front-room TV speakers and other lo-fi solutions. The idea is that if

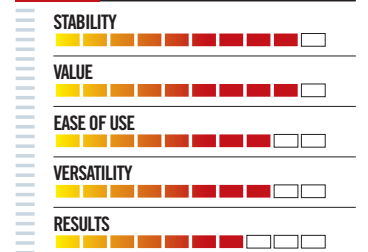
you can make a mix sound good across the range of emulations offered, there's a more than decent chance it will sound great when you're in a position to plug it in to a pair of studio monitors.

The VRM technology is accessed at the bottom of the Saffire MixControl pane and is simple to use. Firstly, select the 'room' in which you want to listen – from a choice of Professional Studio, Living Room or Bedroom Studio – then choose your listening position from a range of options for each environment before selecting the speaker set from a drop-down list of models. These change from one 'room' to another and despite the slightly cryptic names, Focusrite provide a list of the actual gear used for modelling in the manual. One neat detail is that while the VRM monitor mix is sent to headphone port one on the unit's front panel, port two retains a regular stereo mix, meaning that you can hot-swap listening environments while a singer continues to hear an 'unchanging' monitor mix.

Conclusion

Focusrite have definitely delivered something unique here, but only you will be able to judge if VRM is technology you really need. Plenty of experts will advise you that a mix should never be judged through headphones alone and I'm not sure that advice changes even if you have a whole series of virtual environments through which to monitor. The emulations all sound believable and if you do work in an environment that requires you to wear headphones for a significant part of your working life, VRM could be the answer to your prayers. I do wonder, though, whether anyone would trust any headphone technology enough to render a mix at midnight without the benefit of a pair of real trusty monitors come daybreak. If you think you would, feast here. If not, the PRO 24 represents a cheaper, great sounding alternative. **FM**

FutureMusic VERDICT



If you find yourself working with headphones a lot, this might just be the interface for you.