



Softube TSAR-1 £209 PC MAC

It's our old friend the digital algorithmic reverb plug-in, this time from one of the most respected developers around

➤ For a time, convolution reverbs were all the rage, narrowing the gap between the hardware reverbs – and real spaces – we desired and their often inadequate software equivalents. Thankfully, the last few years have seen algorithmic reverb plug-ins seriously up their game, though – even Lexicon are in on it now. See the boxout below if you're not sure of the difference between the two types.

Softube's TSAR-1 takes its sonic inspiration from a number of classic reverbs and is visually. However, it's a bang up-to-date 'true stereo' design using an algorithm that's all its own.

In terms of options, things appear pretty simple, split between slider parameters (pre-delay, decay time, density, tone and high cut) and top row options (early reflections, size and mix, diffusion type, modulation type and overall reverb mix). The same ten parameters and their values are shown in the central display panel, with the previous setting in brackets – clicking on a parameter toggles between the current and most recent value. Reverb time ranges from 150ms to a cavernous 15 seconds with pre-delay up to 1 second – see the manual on the DVD for further details.

TSAR-1 is structured such that early reflections and the main reverb tail are handled separately and mixed. The majority of available parameters are concerned with the tail. The package also includes the 'bonus' TSAR-1R plug

in, which has a simplified control set.

The 'true stereo' nature of TSAR-1 refers to its handling of incoming stereo signals. In old reverbs, if you panned a signal hard left, the reverb would only be heard in the left channel, which is nothing like real life. TSAR-1 uses four reverb engines simultaneously to mimic the effect of stereo sources in a stereo space, and while this is desirable in theory, it's not the only modern reverb to offer true stereo, and neither is it guaranteed to give better results.

Room for improvement?

TSAR-1 includes a reasonable set of presets split between application-specific types (drum chamber, guitar room and so on) and emulations of vintage units. Although there are some large hall options here, there's an excellent selection of medium and smaller spaces. As expected, there is an overall 'signature' to the sound, and we have to say it's a very pleasing one. TSAR-1 delivers everything from a wonderful medium-sized performance space (Jazz Club), to tracking rooms (Studio A and B) and then onto the equipment-influenced AMS Ambience, Digital Snare and various EMT- and Lexicon 224-style presets.

In the mix, TSAR-1 produces an excellent, rich sound that meshes very well with the source material, and the CPU hit is minimal. On the downside, we particularly missed any kind of

low frequency control (either multiplier or low cut). What's more, the high cut seems to roll off the early reflections much less than the reverb tail. However, we were still able to create some excellent width-enhancing effects using just the early reflections, and kept returning to the presets for inspiration. The only other slight niggle is that all presets launch 100% wet.

In the end, all moans are minor when you consider TSAR-1's excellent sound, making it a solid buy if you're in the market for a serious algorithmic reverb. **cm**

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Alternatively

Lexicon LXP Native Reverb Bundle
N/A >> N/A >> £576
Four classic Lexicon algorithms taken from their full PCM package

2CAudio Aether
cm140 >> 10/10 >> \$250
A tweaker's paradise, with a ton of presets for that instant fix

Verdict

For Rich, complex sound
Useable presets
Medium, small and gated spaces excel
Useful TSAR-1R plug-in included

Against No dedicated low-cut options
Only one algorithm

It's not the most flexible reverb we've used, but when it comes to pure quality of sound, TSAR-1 is up there with the best

9/10

Slave to the algorithm

An algorithmic reverb is one that creates the effect of an imaginary space by applying a specifically designed mathematical process to the signal. By contrast, convolution reverbs generate their effect by applying static 'impulse responses' that are essentially samples of real spaces or equipment to the signal. There's plenty of sonic overlap, though – algorithmic reverbs can sound like real spaces, and convolution can mimic algorithmic reverbs.

However, they're flexible in different ways. An algorithmic reverb can be modified considerably in terms of size and balance (pre-delay, early reflections, reverb tail, diffusion, etc), but each algorithm usually has an unshakeable sonic 'signature'. By contrast, modifying impulse responses tends to result in diminishing returns. However, in their defence, you can have a large library of them, giving you a vast palette of virtual spaces.