







## LINE 6 HELIX £1,221

Line 6 goes seriously upmarket with its all-singing, all-dancing dual-DSP processor-loaded Helix. Is this the future?

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### What You Need To Know

- 1 What? Another Line 6 floor processor, then?**  
Well, yes, but this is the company's next generation – and has been four years in development.
- 2 So, it's not just an updated POD or Firehawk under another name?**  
Definitely not. There's a certain family resemblance, but it's a level up from those and features dual-DSP processing, which Line 6 says "provides massive power to accurately recreate the dynamic feel of tube amplifiers, not just their sonic fingerprint".
- 3 Is this ultimately just for professional players?**  
It's not cheap, so you might think that, but consider what you're getting for your money. How much did your amp and all those pedals cost you? For a certain kind of player, this could replace the lot...

It's been six years since Line 6 debuted its HD amp modelling in a range of floor pedalboards, which offered a tangible upgrade in terms of sound quality from the previous units bearing the POD name. And since then, there's been a lot happening in amp modelling with the debut of the Kemper Profiler, with its unique way of taking a snapshot of an amp, and the rise of Fractal's Axe-FX with its dual Sharc processors, both raising the bar in terms of detailed sound.

Line 6 was never going to miss that high-end party, though – especially having become part of the huge Yamaha corporation, with the increased R&D muscle that the acquisition implies – and has unveiled the Helix, featuring its HX technology, another tangible upgrade in sound quality.

With its solid-metal chassis and robust pedal-treadle design, the Helix has a build quality to stand up to onstage environments and a set of connections to cover a whole host of eventualities. Probably the most striking thing when you fire it up is the amount of information displayed and the visual clues it could give you in a dimly-lit stage environment. The main display is large, colourful and informative and each

of the 12 footswitches sit in the centre of a colour-coded LED ring that shows its status. But what's really impressive is the backlit LCD scribble strip above each footswitch that displays the name of its current assignment, whether that may be, to call up a particular stompbox effect, a preset or indeed anything else that you may have assigned.

The Helix follows the usual paradigm of having presets constructed from a signal chain of connected blocks. There are 1,024 preset slots in total, stored in eight 'setlists', each with 32 banks of four presets. Each preset features four stereo signal paths with a whole host of routing options to utilise them, combined or separated. Each path can have up to eight blocks, so there is the possibility, with clever routing, for a chain of 32 blocks, DSP permitting. At present, there are models of 41 amps, seven bass amps, 30 cabs, 16 mics and 80 effects in the Helix, but this number is likely to expand with future firmware upgrades. You can also load your own impulse responses.

A computer-based Helix editor is likely to have been released by the time you read this, but editing is easy on the hardware itself via the large graphic display and a clear menu hierarchy accessed in the main



by a clever multi-function joystick control. Six soft knobs under the display let you quickly adjust parameters displayed above them and things are made even easier by the fact that the footswitches are all touch sensitive; you can use that to assign effects to footswitches or instantly get the assigned effect's parameters to appear in the display. There's even a pedal edit mode so you can select parameters with your foot and edit them using the expression pedal. It's all really intuitive and caters for mid-gig adjustments, as well as building up sounds from scratch at home.

While the Helix may have enough sounds to work as a complete closed system for many players, it also has four send/return loops to allow the incorporation of external effects in the signal chain, should you want to add some favourite pedals and use them as part of a preset. The Helix can, in fact, be

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integrated with other gear in many ways and used as a master controller for the whole system, with various tasks assigned to footswitches. There is all the MIDI implementation you'd need, sockets for external amp switching duties and to send CV data to an analogue synth, plus

Line 6's Variax connection. Versatility in signal routing is aided by analogue connections (XLR and jack) to send two versions of the output signal (same or different) to two different destinations as well as digital connections. A USB socket allows the Helix to be used as an 8-in/8-out audio interface for DAW recording and re-amping of recorded sounds. The Helix's mic and aux sockets, and the guitar input, will allow you to record a variety of sources, all monitored via its headphone output.

In regular use, there are two modes for the footswitches, Preset and Stomp, so you can recall presets or toggle effects on and off. You can swap instantly between these two modes and can even have presets on the bottom footswitch row and effects on the top. There's tap tempo, too, and the expression pedal has a toe switch to toggle two expression parameters. Should you







1. The Helix's pro-aimed features are supported by a solid metal chassis and equally robust pedal treadle design, which can be used for numerous on-the-fly parameter adjustments

2. Four send/return loops allow you to integrate external effects as part of a preset. There's full MIDI implementation, sockets for external amp switching duties plus Line 6's Variax connection

3. The Helix offers 1,024 preset slots in eight 'set lists', each with 32 banks of four presets





4. In brief, the Helix offers 41 guitar amp sims, seven bass amps, 30 cabs, 16 mics and a total of 80 effects. The out-of-the-box sounds are great, while creating your own sounds is where the real fun lies

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need more expression, there's provision to plug in two external pedals.

### Sounds

This is a definite step up from the HD series. Line 6 says its dual-DSP engine provides enough power to accurately recreate both the sonics and dynamic feel of amplifiers, with each stage of a circuit being measured and matched so each model reacts and interacts just like the real thing. We found that to be a pretty accurate assessment of what we feel and hear, with everything reacting naturally to playing dynamics and guitar volume.

The modelled amps and effects – some vintage, some modern, some mainstream, some esoteric – cover a lot of bases and feature lots of intricate detail that can be customised. As ever, while there are plenty of presets to use out of the box, getting beyond those and creating your own is where the real satisfaction resides.

### Verdict

A bit of a technological marvel, the Helix is the most advanced floor processor we've seen, but even with so much in-built flexibility, it is still easy to use. This is a real do-it-all unit both live and in the studio, with comprehensive I/O and routing that will see it used on its own or as the nerve centre of a complete system, large or small. Of course, most of that would count for nothing if the actual sounds were lacking, but they aren't: Line 6 has captured the tonal nuances found in real amps and made it feel like you're playing through the real thing, creating an extremely practical alternative to other high-end products at the right price. **G**



## LINE 6 HELIX

**PRICE:** £1,221

**ORIGIN:** China

**TYPE:** Amp modeller/multi-effects pedalboard processor

**FEATURES:** Tap tempo, tuner, looper, 6.2" 800x480-pixel LCD display

**PRESETS:** 1,024

**MODELS:** 41 amps, 7 bass amps, 30 cabs, 16 mics, 80 effects

**CONTROLS:** Volume, Phones, 1x joystick, 8x 'soft' knobs, 7x buttons, 12x footswitches, ground lift switch, pedal treadle

**CONNECTIONS:** Standard guitar input, standard aux input, XLR mic input, standard Main outputs (L/Mono, R), XLR Main outputs (L/Mono, R), standard stereo phones output, standard Send x4, standard Return x4, s/pdif digital in, s/pdif digital out, AES/EBU and L6 Link out, Variax, MIDI IN, MIDI OUT/THRU, USB, expression pedal x2, Ext amp, CV

**POWER:** Mains power (IEC lead)

**DIMENSIONS:** 560 (w) x 300 (d) x 95mm (h)

**OPTIONS:** Helix Rack, £1,156; Helix Control (foot controller for rack), £330; Helix Backpack, £125

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9/10

**PROS** Comprehensive connectivity; great sound and feel; innovative visual display features

**CONS** A metal bar close to the joystick might have been useful to protect it from clumsy feet