

Mac PC What is it? Portable recording package for guitarists **PRICE: £79**

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IK MULTIMEDIA **computer music** THE REALITY CHECK **StealthPlug** VALUE FOR MONEY

IK have already wowed us with their AmpliTube software, but how will their long-awaited mini audio interface for guitarists stack up?



▲ IK Multimedia's shameless plug

▶ SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

Mac: G4 866MHz (or Intel Core Solo 1.5GHz), 512MB RAM, OS X 10.3.9 (or OS X 10.4.4 for Intel Macs), one free USB port

PC: Pentium III 1GHz/Athlon XP 1.33GHz, 256MB RAM, Windows XP, one free USB port

▶ TEST SYSTEM

HP: HP Pavilion 2GHz, 1GB RAM, Windows XP

Soundcards, soundcards, soundcards. There are, in fact, 37 million in circulation at the moment (probably) and you could plug a guitar into most of them. This being the case, why should anyone be interested in the StealthPlug?

Well first off, it's small and portable. Very portable. It's simply a 1/4" jack-to-USB lead with a small audio interface in the middle (16-bit/44.1kHz or 48kHz performance is possible), so it'll easily fit into a guitar case. A single output can be sent to your monitors or computer speakers, so you can record on your laptop any time you have your guitar with you. What's more, you could take your laptop to a gig and run the StealthPlug's output into your guitar amp, though we wouldn't be too keen on using such a short, flimsy lead week in, week out in a live situation.

Bundle of joy

The best thing about StealthPlug, though, is that it enables you to create complete tracks right away. This is because it comes with a rather splendid suite of software.

No corners have been cut here: you get the full version of Tracktion 2 – which, in case you haven't heard, is one of the finest DAWs on the market – while SampleTank 2 SE and T-RackS EQ are also present. These items alone are more than most would expect to receive, but there's more to come in the shape of AmpliTube 2 Live (which runs both standalone and as a plug-in).

Currently, AmpliTube 2 Live is available exclusively with the StealthPlug, and it features three amp simulations. The two guitar amps are emulations of the classic Marshall and Fender setups, and these will certainly cover most guitarists' needs. It doesn't stop there, though, as you can use the ten 'stompbox' effects to further fine-tune your tones, and there's also a loop playback feature that's great for creative jamming.

All of which makes StealthPlug a very tempting proposition for beginners who just want to buy one product that enables them to 'do it all'. It's true that you won't be able to make the best

quality recordings with it, but at just £79, it represents excellent value for money.

Ready to rock!

As we've already suggested, StealthPlug's portability means that it would certainly be useful if you frequently record on the go, but the real winners are those who play guitar but have yet to take their first steps into computer recording. For them, this is possibly the best solution on the market right now. **cm**

▶ ALTERNATIVELY

Line 6 GuitarPort
cm68 >> **9/10** >> £85
GuitarPort features 20 amp simulations, but its software bundle isn't as good as the StealthPlug's

M-Audio JamLab
cm93 >> **8/10** >> £59
Another interface on a cable... but again, StealthPlug beats it with better software

How 'bout that latency?

Latency: the bane of all guitarists' lives. The delay between the striking of a string and actually hearing the note can make recording super-tight takes a real pain.

Even if they own a good quality soundcard, most people have to put up with a little latency – typically something in the region of around 5-10ms. However, the StealthPlug is said to offer 'Ultra Low Latency' – right down to a tiny 2ms. This is pretty good when you consider that you'd

experience more delay than that if you were standing a few metres from a hardware amp!

When we used the StealthPlug with a latency of 2ms, we were able to make full use of AmpliTube's standard amp settings, and it wasn't till we dialled in the 'full rig' setups that popping started to occur. Happily, going up to 3ms sorted this out, which is very impressive.



▲ We tried to fry it, but the StealthPlug came through all our tests

VERDICT

- FOR**
- + A complete start-up package
 - + Very low latency
 - + AmpliTube 2 is almost worth the price alone
 - + Great for laptop users

- AGAINST**
- It's never going to yield the sound quality of a more expensive soundcard
 - Stereo jack output only
 - Host has to be closed for latency to be adjusted
 - Slightly flimsy lead

We can see the attraction of StealthPlug, and we're sure that a lot of other people will too. There's nothing else quite like it

RATING

