



IK Multimedia PC MAC



AmpliTube Fender £196

Amp simulation wizards IK Multimedia return with a brand-focused collection. Can it really deliver that legendary Fender sound?

System requirements

PC Pentium 4/Athlon XP CPU, 1GB RAM, Windows XP/Vista, VST/RTAS host for plug-in use

Mac Dual 1GHz G4/1.5GHz Intel CPU, 1GB RAM, Mac OS X 10.4, AU/VST/RTAS host for plug-in use

Test system

Mac Mac Pro dual 3GHz, 3GB RAM, OS X 10.5.5, Logic Pro 8

> IK Multimedia's AmpliTube is one of the most acclaimed software amp simulators on the market. It's been rolled out in various forms, including AmpliTube 2, Jimi Hendrix, Ampeg SVX, Metal, and now the officially endorsed Fender version. All bear the 'Powered by AmpliTube' legend, and between them they cover an impressive 38 amps, 45 cabinets, 57 pedals and 30 rack effects.

AmpliTube Fender includes 12 amps, 12 cabinets, nine microphones, six pedals and six rack effects. Like all AmpliTube products, Fender comes in both plug-in and standalone formats, the latter intended for live performance (or practice, of course). You can also choose from a number of preset routing configurations, to create, for example, dual amp setups. The standalone version also includes the rather useful SpeedTrainer audio player, which enables you to slow down tracks to aid in learning parts.

Signature sounds

As the name implies, AmpliTube Fender only emulates Fender guitar gear. With such headline amps as Twin Reverb and Vibro-King in the pack,

this is patently obvious, but the rack effects (Pitch Shift, Tape Echo, Sine Flange, Triangle Chorus, Wah and Compressor) are sourced from Fender's more recent Cyber-Twin amp, while the pedals (Blender, Phaser, Fuzz Wah, Tape Echo, Volume and '63 Reverb) are from throughout the company's history.

There are cabinets to match their respective amps (although you can mix and match), and with the exception of the Bassman 300 and Metalhead, these are all combos. Mic emulations vary from the commonplace SM57 and U87 to the more unusual Beyer M160 ribbon and Sennheiser MD441. On- and off-axis settings and near and far positioning allow for plenty of sonic variety from the mic options alone.

IK are keen to point out that AmpliTube Fender is their most accurately modelled package to date, citing extensive use of their Dynamic Saturation Modelling (DSM) and the recreation of each and every stage of the amps and effects. IK have also developed something called Volumetric Response Modelling (VRM), which has enabled them to capture the sound of the Vibratone Rotary Speaker.

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Of course, Fender have approved the sounds of the package, too. You'll also find options for activating oversampling for pedals or amps and a high-resolution mode - inevitably, these carry an accompanying CPU hit.

Historic figures

Clearly, AmpliTube Fender's big draw is its amp emulations. Half of these stem from their rock 'n' roll hey-day and include the '59 Bassman LTD, '57 Deluxe, '64 Vibroverb Custom and '65 Deluxe Reverb, as well as the '65 Twin Reverb and Vibro-King Custom already mentioned. The other six amps are more recent: the Champion 600, Super-Sonic, MH-500 Metalhead, Pro Junior, Bassman 300 and TBP-1 Bass Preamp.

So, if you're after the full-scale classic valve-driven sound to couple with a Strat or Tele, you've got six great choices in the older units. The other amps offer broader capabilities, such as bass-specific amps. The Bassman 300 is a modern rig with graphic EQ and compression, while the TBP-1 offers a classic tube preamp with modern overdrive and EQ.

For a more contained, 'studio' sound for electric guitar, you've got the Pro Junior and Champion 600 amps, while metal maniacs should try the MH-500 Metalhead rig, which has a solid-state power amp. Finally, Fender's recent Super-Sonic valve amp gets a look in, although only the Burn channel is included (the Vintage channel is absent).

Plug and play

Just dropping the plug-in onto prerecorded guitars in a mix revealed plenty of recognisable Fender tones, from the thickness of the Bassman to the direct, punchy sound of the Champion 600 and on through the rich, creamy Twin Reverb. Purely in amp terms, you're spoilt for choice, and while the pedal effects aren't very extensive, at least they're all good.

The fun really started for us when we used Fender in real time with a Stratocaster - it successfully sculpted that potentially weedy Strat tone into all manner of rich, solid and distinctive sounds. Our favourite amp was definitely the '57 Deluxe, but each model offers



Every aspect of the Fender design has been nailed, from the authentic grille cloths to the magnificent tones



X-Gear enables you to combine individual units from across the AmpliTube range

The X factor

The amps and effects from the various AmpliTube packages can be used in conjunction with each other thanks to IK's X-Gear, which is a free download for registered users. This expandable 'shell-host' comes in both standalone and plug-in formats, and is visually identical to the interface you get with any AmpliTube product.

You can access presets for individual elements (amp, cab, pedal, rack) as well as the full rig presets, and they're all categorised by product (Jimi Hendrix, Metal, Fender, etc). There are also presets that combine modules from multiple AmpliTube titles, although you'll need to own the particular

editions used in a patch to load it up.

X-Gear offers the same automation system as the regular AmpliTube: each module parameter (ie, knobs and switches of pedals/amps/effects) can be assigned to one of 16 host automation parameters.

There's also a MIDI implementation that's exclusive to X-Gear, but it only gives access to controls for preset next/previous, stomp bypass, and volume/wah/Wharmonator. This is pretty lacking compared to some of the competition, such as Overloud TH1, which lets you control almost any combination of parameters via MIDI CCs, and jump to specific patches.

something slightly different. Overall, the Metalhead impressed us the least, but by contrast, the recent Super-Sonic was brilliant.

Much like the pedals, the rack effects are only really the icing on the cake, but they're useful for certain effects, such as chorus and flanging. It is frustrating, though, that the effects are rigidly divided into pedal and rack categories - since there's no compression pedal, we'd love to be able to place the Compressor rack before the amps, but you just can't do it. And you *still* can't reorder the effects, though X-Gear can combine elements from different AmpliTube products to create monster rigs - see the boxout for more.

Gripes aside, AmpliTube Fender is IK's most convincing amp sim product to date, and it can produce so many new and old tones that you really are spoilt for choice. On the downside, CPU usage can be considerable, particularly with the high resolution and oversampling modes activated. But all told, we're enormously impressed by this package, as all it's really lacking when compared to the real thing is that physical guitar-amp-player interaction. **cm**

Contact IK Multimedia UK, 0800 0934066
 Web www.ikmultimedia.com
 Info Studio cutdown, inc StealthPlug, £127

Alternatively

Native Instruments Guitar Rig 3 cm120 >> 9/10 >> £269
 Includes a foot pedal controller - software version is available, too

Waves GTR3 N/A >> N/A >> £115
 Emulates classic gear - pedal board and PRS preamp are optional

Verdict

For Wide selection of Fender sounds
 Good range of presets
 Fantastic sound quality
 Easy to create rigs from scratch

Against CPU hit can be high
 Metalhead amp is only average
 No compressor pedal
 MIDI implementation isn't great

IK Multimedia do the Fender name proud with the best-sounding AmpliTube to date

9/10