



ON THE DVD



MOTU Traveler

An interface that travels? **Jono Buchanan** takes MOTU's latest out and about and finds himself a liberated soul...

DETAILS

PRICE £740

CONTACT

Tel: 01767 313447
Web: www.motu.com

TECH SPEC

Bus-powered FireWire audio interface
Four combo XLR/TRS mic/guitar inputs with preamps and 48V phantom power
Digital Gain adjustment
4 x 24-bit TRS inputs
8 x TRS outputs
8-channel ADAT digital I/O
AES/EBU digital I/O
MIDI I/O
CueMix mixing & monitoring software
Audiodesk software provides 24-bit recording
375mm x 229mm
1.72Kg

SOME OF THE biggest names in technology are waking up to the possibilities of more compact, portable gear, and with laptop sales always increasing, it's no surprise that audio interface manufacturers are amongst the pioneers.

Enter MOTU's Traveler. Building on their fine reputation and nestling into both a busy range and a bustling marketplace, this is a new addition which MOTU are touting as their 'portable solution'. With FireWire bus-powered operation, a host of high-definition I/O possibilities, and an increased focus on integration with the onboard CueMix DSP, could this be the answer for all of us who would rather be programming outside our dingy studios?

Getting up and running

Simply pop a FireWire cable in the back and install the bundled audio drivers to kick-start Traveler into action. After a quick installation process, you're away. In use with Logic as a host, all I need to do is select the Traveler as my chosen interface and that's that.

Appearance-wise, the interface is similar to MOTU'S own 828 Mk.II,

with a bright LCD that keeps you updated with modified parameters and the current set-up. Around this you'll find I/O metering to the right and preamp set-up controls to the far left. These correspond to inputs 1-4, found on the back panel, and include independent switches for 48V phantom power, plus a digitally-controlled input trim knob for each channel, which doubles as a 20dB pad when depressed.

In short, this means that there's a maximum input control of a whopping 73dB. This should ensure that you can plug almost anything in and get a decent level out. Any dial adjusted at the front is instantly displayed as a value on the LCD.

The rear panel concerns itself with connectivity, featuring eight analogue ins and outs and S/PDIF, AES/EBU, Word Clock I/O and ADAT sync potential too. You'll also find two FireWire ports here. All these options mean that space is at a premium, and accordingly the power inlet, battery-pack power option and MIDI I/O have been shifted to the right-hand side panel. This is an interesting move as it means that these are inaccessible if you choose

to screw Traveler into a rack. The power supply is not so important, due to the interface's bus-powered compatibility, but MIDI users might pause for thought. Still, the myriad connection possibilities described here means that a total of 20 inputs and 22 outputs are on offer, which is phenomenal for a box of this size.

In operation

The Traveler is a joy to use. If you're using a host DAW, simply connect your source to the appropriate input, give the trim control a tweak and you're away. In the heat of a session, the direct access to channel's 1-4 input trims is a really neat touch.

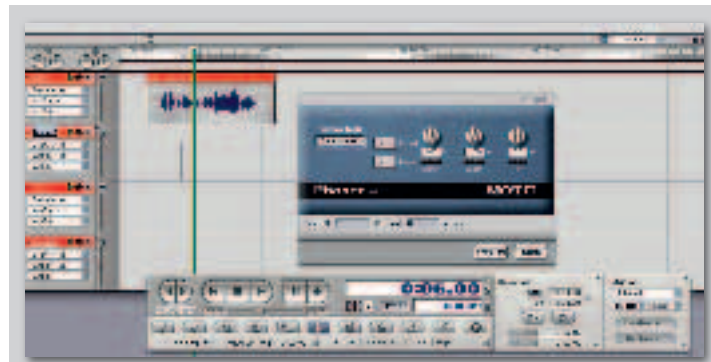
These dials offer increments of 1dB. The onboard preamps produce a wonderfully clean sound, which easily surpass my 828 MkI and actually keep pace with dedicated channel strips. The volume dial is also thoughtfully constructed, as it toggles between master output and headphone volume via a simple press.

Sonically, my only gripe here is that the maximum headphone volume isn't quite loud enough. As the Traveler is aimed at those



interested in going out and making location recordings, the headphone port is going to see quite a lot of action, and a few extra dBs here wouldn't go amiss.

Elsewhere, six dials offer control of Traveler's onboard CueMix DSP mixer, and this is where life can get a little bit more involved. Effectively, if you so desire, Traveler has been designed for complete standalone use, whereby anything you might want to tweak is available directly from the unit, without having to use computer software for control. One example is that you can adjust input and output levels to set up groups of independent submixes, which could be used as headphone or monitor feeds, either onstage or in the studio. I was initially sceptical about how practical such standalone operation might be, but once you've spent a



Audiodesk

IF YOU'RE A MAC user, another benefit of buying Traveler is the included Audiodesk software, which comes bundled on the single Installer CD. This software has now reached version 2, and is effectively a cut-down version of MOTU's flagship DAW, Digital Performer. While it lacks the versatility and detail of its big brother, Audiodesk is more than a mere whipper-snapper.

As you would expect, integration with Traveler is seamless, and once you've booted the application you're quickly up and running. There's no MIDI, but audio recording and editing is simple enough, and the included manual is comprehensive if your use of the software becomes more involved. Of particular note are the 23 bundled plug-ins, which range from EQ and dynamics controllers to filters, flangers and phasers. These allow for gentle processing of your audio or more serious sound mangling, if you so desire.

little time familiarising yourself with the Traveler, it's impressive that the design encourages you to get busy with those knobs. Inevitably, there is a learning curve, particularly as a large number of tweakable parameters lie beneath just six dials. Any changes that you decide to make can be saved as a preset, with 16 of these available.

And so to sum up...

It's impossible not to like the Traveler, as it makes life so simple for you.

Everything I threw at it was handled with consummate ease, which immediately inspires confidence. If you just want to plug this box in and get going, you'll be doing so within two minutes of removing the packaging. Alternatively, if you spend a little longer working through those menus, you'll find a very flexible solution to a number of recording and live scenarios. It's a busy marketplace out there, but Traveler offers a combination of functions that make it a standout choice. **FM**

ALTERNATIVES

MOTU 828 MkII
 (£546, 10/9/8/9/9, FM146)
 MOTU provide their own competition with Version 2 of the trusty 828 interface. Not bus-powered and with only two mic inputs, the 828 nevertheless sounds great, and knocks a decent amount off the Traveler's price.
www.motu.com



DIGIDESIGN DIGI 002 RACK
 £799, 8/10/10/8/10, FM140)
 Digidesign's 002 is certainly a popular choice for those wanting to get their hands on the bundled LE software. Like the Traveler, it offers four high-quality mic preamps. Not bus-powered, though, and at 2U tall, a less portable solution.
www.digidesign.com

EVERYTHING I THREW AT TRAVELER, IT HANDLED WITH CONSUMMATE EASE

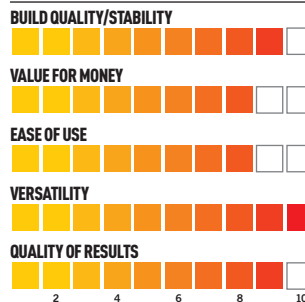


ON THE DVD



Listen to what MOTU's Traveler can do on this month's DVD. Go to page 143 for more information.

VERDICT MOTU TRAVELER



Traveler provides a unique feature-set which should see it compete well with its rivals.