

MOTU 8Pre | £495

MOTU's new FireWire audio interface doubles up as a standalone converter. *Dan Harper* gets inside...

WHAT IS IT?

A FireWire audio/MIDI interface with eight mic/instrument preamps for recording and interfacing

CONTACT

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HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 Eight mic/instrument preamps
- 2 Standalone conversion
- 3 Expandable

SPECS

Mac: G3/300MHz PowerMac or faster equipped with at least one FireWire Port
Mac OSX (version 10.3.9 or later)

PC: A 1GHz Pentium-based PC (or faster) equipped with at least one FireWire port

A Pentium III processor or faster is recommended
256MB RAM (512MB or more is recommended)
20GB HD

Weight:

2kg

Dimensions:

485 x 175 x 450mm

We've seen a number of 8-way preamps over the last few years, so good to see interfacing stalwarts

MOTU get on the case. And the 8Pre, on first impressions, looks appealing – Black, rack-mountable, eight mic/line preamps with phantom power and pad switching, standalone conversion capabilities – and you can daisy-chain further units if you require.

It has a slight Tonka toy-feel due to the stiffness of its metal switches with the rear offering eight rugged XLR/quarter-inch inputs. The main output is stereo quarter-inch only, though – fine for someone like me who no longer owns a mixing desk, but has the potential to be limiting for others.

But all this fades into insignificance given the 8Pre's capability as a standalone converter, adding eight channels of 88.2 or 96kHz analogue input to any 96kHz optical device via two optical ports.

In use

On first use with a skeleton track, the high end sounds a little more harsh or NS10-like than my MBox2, E-mu 1616M and Digidesign 888/24 running

through Dynaudio and Spondor monitoring. On a fuller mix it sounded more balanced though, and with a slightly tighter bass than the others.

The CueMix DSP mixer software we've seen plenty of times before with other MOTU products, and is straightforward enough to use, adding an extra hint of near zero-latency versatility. But how great would it be to find DSP FX in this little beauty instead? That would really push the boundaries and competition venturing into the Pro Tools TDM/HD camp.

If you're using a Mac, the 8Pre ships with its own Audio Desk software for audio/MIDI production. It appears to cater to most needs and will be more familiar to those using Digital Performer. However, I'm a strong advocate of sticking to greater industry standards, such as Logic, Pro Tools and Cubase/Nuendo. This should cheer up PC users, of course, as there's no Audio Desk for you included anyhow!

I also tested the mic/instrument preamps with my Steinberger bass alongside the Digidesign MBox2 preamps. The difference is negligible, but on a vocal test with a Shure SM57 the MOTU sounds thinner and more

brittle than the MBox2 – useable, but not as warm or harmonically pleasing. But with eight preamps, at this price it's still great value (especially as, when tested against the E-mu 1616M's preamps, it wins the day).

The 8Pre offers 64-bit drivers for PC and supports both Intel and Power Mac with sample rates of 44.1, 48, 88.2 and 96kHz. There's front level access to all controls, a built-in MIDI interface and power supply, onboard SMPTE synchronisation, analogue input meters and a switchable output trim to your monitors or headphones.

The eight analogue inputs work at 24-bit with 64x oversampling A/D converters, while the main outputs offer 24-bit, 128x oversampling D/A conversion. And, as you might expect, all audio is also carried to the computer in a 24-bit stream.

A winner?

The 8Pre is a useful interface for desktop and laptop users alike, and there's no need to stop with eight preamps as the 8Pre is chainable. It's worth checking out the competition from Presonus and Focusrite (for example) with their hot preamps, but I don't think you'll find any standalone conversion there. **FM**

FutureMusic VERDICT

BUILD



VALUE



EASE OF USE



VERSATILITY



RESULTS



The 8Pre is great value and is certainly versatile – a few more outs wouldn't have gone amiss, though.

