

Roland SP-555 | £410

Roland has upped the ante with more features and Loop Capture. *Marc '01'* gets the SP on the 555

The SP-555 is visually similar to the SP-404, with illuminated pads, and a host of dials for real-time control. In the box along with the sampler are the manual, a quick-start guide, external PSU, software CD and a copy of Sonar LE for computer-based recording.

For anyone with a bit of sampling experience, the quick-start guide should be enough to get them up and running. It has clear, colour visuals and simple instructions on hooking up the connections, formatting the compact flash card and generally jamming out the essential features of sampling and sequencing. The full manual is a deeper, 70-page affair that fleshes out all the details to the minutiae, and no doubt will be dipped into to reveal the inner most workings of the machine.

The SP-555 can sample from a number of different sources. There's the

There's a clue in the name that suggests that Roland's new SP-555 sampler sits somewhere between the quick and dirty SP-404 and the workstation SP-606. In fact, it borrows features

from both models while adding the new Loop Capture feature to the set. On paper it seems like an ideal upgrade for SP-404 users who have mastered their machine and are now looking for that extra bit of power and control.



WHAT IS IT?

A sampling groovebox for DJs, beatsmiths and live performers alike

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HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 Seamless Loop layering
- 2 Doubles its usefulness as a USB soundcard and MIDI port
- 3 DJFX and BPM Looper effects



stereo line input, EXT source, which covers mics (dynamic and +48 phantom power), and Hi-Z for guitars and so on.

There's also a convenient mic built into the top panel, right next to the mic level dial – although this does require

in with the external inputs for a more flexible set of recording options.

There are two recording modes (both mono or stereo), normal full frequency and lo-fi, which sounds half as good unless you happen to like that 8-bit sound and its inherent dirty, crunchy

there isn't some kind of pre-recording buffer to prevent this.

Sampling quality is perfectly acceptable, there's nothing noticeably coloured or deteriorated about the sound quality, unless you accidentally choose lo-fi. The compact flash card

can also be used to import and export samples. The SP-555 has its own propriety recording format so files need to be dropped on to the flashcard, then

imported into the machine. One little crapper is that files must be WAV or AIF (and not AIFF – the extra 'F' will eff things up and cause the machine to point blank refuse your files entry into the system). Sample editing and pattern sequencing are both on the basic tip. Editing is limited to changing the start and points by ear, and sequencing is all done live with the option to quantise; either straight or with varying degrees of shuffle.

Mash up effects

Straight-up sampling is all well and good, but mashing them up with effects is where it really kicks off. The SP-555 has 37 different effects at your disposal, 32 of these are categorized as MFX and selected via the sample pads,

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vocalists to get right up close and practically kiss the panel to get a decent vocal level. It can also re-sample from the pads, which means that phrases, patterns and samples with effects added can be captured and also mixed

noise (in which case it's twice as good, since it doubles the amount of recording time). Eleven minutes mono recording comes as standard and this is expandable to 772 minutes with a 2GB compact flash card, which has its own little access hatch around the front.

Recording options

Several recording options are available including manual, tempo (for a specific length) and auto, whereby a volume threshold triggers recording. In practice, the SP-555 never quite captures the first few hairs of the recording, which can leave some attack portions of kicks a bit blunt. With certain material, those with good ears will notice immediately, while with less critical sounds and ears it will never be an issue. It's a shame

D Beam Synth

One of the cutest features of the SP-555 is the old-school, analogue-style mono synth, which is controlled in real time through the D Beam. It's unashamedly silly (in a charming way) and with a bit of practice can actually produce some cool results.

There are eight basic waveforms to choose from, including pitch-modulated

versions, plus eight levels of delay effect to plaster on top. This goes from raw, raspy saw waves to wet and warbling Theremin-style leads. Unlike the free-flowing Theremin, this synth adheres to set scales to produce specific notes and there are 21 or so on the menu from minor blues to Spanish, whole tone and

Hexatonic. The root note can be set so that it's all tuned nicely to the backing music, and the MFX unit can be slapped on to take it to another level. It takes a fine degree of self control to play a riff consistently, and it would be much easier if the D Beam had a longer range, but it can be done once the skills are in place.



SPECS

Hardware

Pads: 16 with velocity sensitivity
Control Knobs x 3,
D Beam Controller
Maximum Polyphony: 12 voices
Data Format: SP-555 original format, WAV/AIFF import/export
Sampling Mode: Standard, lo-fi
Memory Card: CompactFlash Type 1, 32MB to 2GB compatible

Maximum Sampling Time (mono, approx.)

Internal Memory: Standard 11min, lo-fi 22min
Memory Card: 2GB: Standard 772freshmin, lo-fi 1,544min
Loop Capture: 15 sec

Samples

Internal: 32
Memory Card: 128

Patterns

Internal: 32
Memory Card: 128

Pattern Sequencer

Internal Memory: approx. 8,000 notes
Memory Card: approx. 8,000 notes
Resolution: 96 ticks per quarter note
Pattern Length: 1-99 measures

Signal Processing

AD/DA: 24-bits / 44.1kHz
Effects: 37 types

In/Outs

Stereo in / out (RCA), Headphones, Internal Mic, Mic jack (quarter-inch or XLR type, Hi-Z, phantom power), Pedal jack, MIDI In/Out, USB (MIDI and Audio), Memory Card Slot

Size:

280 x 264 x 74mm

Weight:

1.8kg



