

# M-Audio Fast Track Ultra 8R | £333

Meet the most flexible member of M-Audio's Fast Track family. *Jono Buchanan* plugs in...

### WHAT IS IT?

The latest addition to M-Audio's impressive Fast Track USB interface series

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### HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 8 mic/line inputs
- 2 MX Core DSP software
- 3 Logical and flexible layout

**M**-Audio have been busy bunnies of late, with a veritable torrent of new audio interfaces pouring

onto the shelves. A couple of months ago, I had a look at the rather nifty Fast Track Ultra, a half-rack USB audio interface and last month, it was the turn of the M-Powered compatible ProFire 2626, a FireWire interface with more I/O options than some might consider healthy. This month sees the release of Fast Track Ultra's big brother, the rack-mountable 8R, offering a few tasty additions over its smaller sibling.

### Nice rack

The unit occupies a single rack space with the front panel adorned with controls and the rear one packed with connections. The 8R offers 8 simultaneous inputs and outputs, with hybrid XLR/line inputs offered for all eight channels round the back.

Additionally, two 'instrument' inputs are offered for inputs 1 and 2, with these connections made on the front panel and switches to determine whether you'd like to use these over the rear panel inputs. To the right, phantom

power buttons activate 48V for channels 1-4 and 5-8 separately, which is useful if you're recording with a mixture of condenser and dynamic microphones.

Lastly, there are two independent headphone ports, each with their own level controls. Usefully, the front panel also keeps you in visual contact with the connections you've made, with each input channel offering both signal

'present' and 'clip' LEDs. At the back, in addition to the eight inputs, a 4 x 2 matrix of line level connections provide the eight outputs, while there is also a breakout cable which gives you connection to both the 8R's MIDI capabilities and its digital audio ports.

MIDI-wise, you're given single In and Out connectors, while digital I/O is provided via S/PDIF, again with two connections for input and output respectively. The all-important USB connector resides next to the power supply input, while at the other end, the final connections are a pair of Inserts for channels 1 and 2. If you have a favourite compressor you like to record through, here's your chance to patch in. One important note – the 8R is a USB 2.0 only device, so be warned that it's not for you pre-historic USB 1.1 types.

### Software support

If you've kept abreast of M-Audio's recent audio interface development, it won't come as a surprise to learn that,

### The Fast Track Family

Frankly, you'd be forgiven for scratching your head right now if you're in the market for a new audio interface and you've come to the sensible decision that M-Audio's Fast Track range may well have your needs covered. To help you understand the key

differences between the models, let's take a quick look at the specs of the more junior models. Starting at £120, you can pick up a Fast Track Pro which you could comfortably fit in a coat pocket. Featuring stereo I/O, this is very much a

monitoring and occasional recording laptop companion. For £102 more, the half-rack Fast Track Ultra could be yours. This offers the Octane preamps of the 8R and introduces the MX Core DSP software. XLR inputs are limited to 4, though 8 ins and outs are offered simultaneously. It offers hardware inserts and it can operate in bus-powered mode, though this does limit the unit to stereo I/O.





alongside this comprehensive hardware spec, is a software brain to match. The MX Core DSP technology provides a full virtual mixer which you can adapt and shape to suit your studio's requirements, or the specifics of a particular session. Perhaps most importantly, this includes the opportunity to add digital effects processing to the monitor mix while

number of inputs channels to 16, in that each of the eight physical inputs are represented by software channel strips, which in turn can feed a series of eight return channels. These can then be routed to the eight outputs.

**Going super-sonic**

This allows for a whole series of possibilities, with headphone auxiliary

play and you'll be making quality recordings with it in no time.

**Conclusion**

M-Audio have a well-deserved reputation for building quality interfaces and the Fast Track 8R isn't going to do it any harm. It sounds clean, it offers plenty of flexibility and, compared to its junior siblings, it has I/O to burn.

Principally, the additional four XLR inputs and more rugged housing are the main differences between the 8R and the Fast Track Ultra. However, if

The whole operation of the 8R is child's play and you'll be making quality recordings with it in no time

recording, foregoing the need to rely on your DAW software to provide this.

Of course, if you do want to use your DAW's own mixer environment to run your session, no problem – simply install the driver, boot your software of choice and assign the inputs and outputs. However, the alternative is to run the MX Core DSP software, which then lets you assign inputs and outputs, set up software monitor paths, choose the monitor reverb of your choice, as well as keeping tabs on signal flow and other parameters.

Everything is clearly laid out and I'm not surprised M-Audio are exploiting this software on a whole range of their interfaces, as it works a treat. Effectively, it's possible to swell the

mixes and drum or vocal groupings among the most immediately obvious. What I particularly like is that you can really explore the possibilities here and know that you'll have your bases covered in even intensive recording sessions, without having to be constantly patching and re-patching your interface. However, all of this would be meaningless if the interface itself didn't sound the business.

This is my third opportunity in as many months to pass signals through M-Audio's Octane preamps and I'm not bored of them yet. They sound bold, clear and ever so slightly warm without being too coloured – somehow better than much of the competition out there. The whole operation of the 8R is child's

you need an interface that will let you record drums one day and a vocal session the next, the 8R comes thoroughly recommended. **FM**

**FutureMusic VERDICT**

**BUILD** [Progress bar: 8/10]

**VALUE** [Progress bar: 7/10]

**EASE OF USE** [Progress bar: 8/10]

**VERSATILITY** [Progress bar: 7/10]

**RESULTS** [Progress bar: 8/10]

**If you need eight quality mic inputs with bundled preamps, this interface could be for you**

**SPECS**

- 8 x 8 USB 2.0 Interface with 8 preamps and MX Core DSP software
- MX Core DSP technology – Effects monitoring while recording, DSP mixing interface expands to 16 x 8
- 8 M-Audio Octane preamps – 8 XLR/TRS combo jacks for mic or line-level inputs
- 20dB pad on each preamp
- Signal/peak LED indicators
- +48V phantom power
- 2 front-panel 1/4" instrument inputs
- 8 balanced TRS outputs
- 2 analog inserts
- S/PDIF digital I/O
- MIDI interface
- 2 headphone outputs with independent volume control
- ASIO 2.0, WDM, MME and Core Audio support
- System Requirements**
- PC:** Windows XP with SP2: 1.6GHz CPU, Direct X 9.0c, USB 2.0 port, 512 MB RAM
- Mac:** OS X 10.4.11, USB 2.0 port, 512 MB RAM, G4 1GHz CPU (for Power PC)
- \*USB 1.1 operation is not supported

**ALTERNATIVES**



**M-Audio Fast Track Ultra**  
£223

If you need something more compact and portable and are prepared to sacrifice a few physical connections while saving a bit of wedge, this could be just the ticket. Especially as, unlike its big brother, it's buss-powered.

[maudio.co.uk](http://maudio.co.uk)



**Focusrite Saffire Pro 10 I/O**  
£300

This bad boy also knows a few things about offering quality preamps too. Eight of these come packed into this FireWire interface, which also offers onboard DSP and S/PDIF I/O.

[focusrite.com](http://focusrite.com)

