PreSonus FireStudio Project | £350

The features you need at a keen price point. *Daniel Griffiths* checks whether the cut-down FireStudio still matches its full-featured brother

HIGHLIGHTS

1 Easy to use
2 Great mic pres
3 Tough and portable

SPECS

High-speed FireWire
audio interface

24-bit resolution up to 96k
sample rate

Eight Class-A XMAX mic
preamps with gain controls

Eight analogue line inputs,
two instrument inputs

MIDI I/O

JetPLL jitter elimination
technology

Zero latency DSP full-matrix
mixer/router

PreSonus ProPak software
suite with Cubase LE 4,
Cubase LE 4 Demystified
DVD tutorial, Wave Arts
TrackPlug LE, Wave Arts
Masterverb LE, PreSonus
EyeQ, Audio Damage
FuzzPlus2 and Filterpod,
Pluggo Jr, Camel Crusher,
BFD Lite, Discrete Drums
Sampler, Twiddly

Back in issue 195, we sung the praises of Presonus' FireStudio – a 19-incher packed with enough ins and outs to satisfy the busiest of project studios. And with top-quality Presonus mic-pres in attendance, plus a talk-back equipped MSR remote control option, we could see it making the grade in many commercial facilities. In fact, our main bugbear was the slight overkill of features, making it a rather heavyweight option for the home user yet – due to it's diminutive rack size – never considered truly 'pro' by more serious studio owners.

Fire starter

Which brings us to the FireStudio Project – an at-a-glance identical looking unit that strips out some of the more exotic jacks to leave behind a feature set ideally placed to ensnare home users who are serious about their sound. The Project offers the same rock-solid construction as it's bigger brother and once again the 19-inch rack is surprisingly shallow (about four inches) meaning that it's easily portable. And – as a bonus this time around – the power supply is built in, so no more bespoke power plug to remember to bring.

Out front, there's the same eight Class-A XMAX PreSonus mic pres that we've had the pleasure of using in the past while at the back there's a no-nonsense selection of stereo send and return, eight individual outs and a main stereo pair. Plus the usual MIDI In and Out and a pair of FireWires. The main casualty of the cut down has been the digital S/PDIF ins and outs and sixteen channel ADAT support. So the choice is simple – if you need these, check out the full FireStudio. If not – and we suspect that many home users don't – then go for the Project.
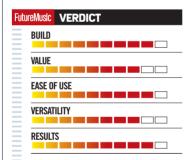
It even comes with a stripped-down version of the same Control Station software that we heaped praise on last time around. FireControl for Mac or PC gives extensive routing and level options for every in and out, effectively sitting between the hardware and the internal brains of your DAW. It's a brilliantly simple 18x10 matrix that'll let you send any in to any out. The options are therefore enormous – be it to simply send eight mics or line ins to eight tracks on your DAW, or for creating stereo monitor mixes and routing them to the outs on the back. It's this software that has allowed the unit to appear deceptively simple, with all controls (bar the eight handy gains on the front) rendered on screen. There's even room on the front for eight three-segment LEDs for level monitoring this time. Not essential, but nice if you're away from a computer and using the Project as a simple set of pres.

Fired up

Sound quality was identical to our FireStudio – these mic pres really are up to the job of getting the best out of your mics, sounding warm and full and – once again – in our tests with Logic, it worked perfectly. Logic found the interface and offered up its ins and outs at the first attempt. That said, the software bundle is so extensive you don't need to already own a DAW at all!

The Project is up against plenty of stiff competition – the excellent Fast Track Ultra 8R from M-Audio springs to mind, which features such luxuries as a pair of headphone outs and S/PDIF round the back – but if you're fussy about your mic pres then the Project is well worth checking out. **FM**

FutureMusic **VERDICT**
BUILD
VALUE
EASE OF USE
VERSATILITY
RESULTS

Great pres, backed up with great software. Getting quality sound into your DAW has never been easier.