Focusrite Saffire PRO 24 | £243

The Saffire has been with us for some time but shows no signs of fatigue, finds ***Jono Buchanan***

WHAT IS IT?

A studio or portable audio interface from Focusrite for high-quality audio recording and flexible I/O

CONTACT

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HIGHLIGHTS

1 MixControl software highly flexible
2 Great-sounding preamps
3 Light and highly portable

SPECS

Front and Rear Connectivity:
Analogue channel inputs (inputs 1 – 4), 2 x XLR mic/line Neutrik combi jacks, 2 x XLR instrument Neutrik combi jacks (instrument on inputs 1 and 2 only)

Digital Channel Inputs:
(Inputs 5-14) 44.1 – 96kHz, stereo S/PDIF input on RCA, 1 x 8-channel ADAT input on optical connector, 6 x TRS analogue outputs (outputs 1 – 6), 1 x TRS stereo headphone output

Other I/O:
1 x 6-pin FireWire 400 socket, 2 standard 5-pin DIN MIDI connectors: In and Out, 12V DC power input connector for use with external PSU

Dimensions:
215 x 45 x 220mm

Weight:
1.6kg

I was lucky enough to get my hands on the original Saffire interface back in the summer of 2005 and while, four years on, this is only my second chance to see Focusrite's hardware up close, I've been impressed by how the range has expanded to meet the needs of studios of different sizes and producers with different needs in the intervening period. Focusrite's newest addition to the Saffire range is the PRO 24, which arrives in half-rack form. Despite its modest size, a quick glance at the front and back panels reveals there's plenty to admire, so let's dive in.

Stacked

At the back, you'll find most of the Saffire's I/O options. These include two line inputs and six outputs (meaning that like the original Saffire, this unit will support surround applications), as well as the all-important FireWire connection, MIDI In/Out and a 12V DC input (though the interface is also buss-powered via its FireWire connector). Digital connectivity is supplied by S/PDIF In/Out ports, and there's an optical port which provides an additional eight inputs.

At the front you'll find the PRO 24's twin combi XLR/line inputs, plus a switch to enable 48V of phantom power (the single switch enables this for both channels). Otherwise the front panel concerns itself with Gain knobs, the main output Monitor dial and a separate headphone output control, with assorted LEDs providing status updates for levels, phantom power presence and the like. Impressively, the Saffire can handle 16 inputs and eight outputs, which provides immense flexibility for a unit this size.

Up and running

Installing the Saffire is painless. Once you've popped in the bundled CD, you'll find there are two separate install processes, one for Saffire's 'software brain' MixControl software and the other for Focusrite's plug-in suite. If you're online during install, the installer even checks to see if a newer version of the software is available, which is a neat touch. The Focusrite Suite installs four plug-ins (Compressor, EQ, Gate and Reverb), which can be activated via a serial number for up to four separate computers. You'll also find a second bundled disc entitled Xcite+ Pack that contains some tasty extras, including Live Lite 7, a copy of the BassStation plug-in and some great samples.

Once restarted, the Saffire is a snip to use. It is most easily configured within the MixControl GUI, which keeps you updated with levels across all I/Os as well as allowing you to set up different mixes and monitor configurations that you can then toggle between on the fly. The standout feature for me, however – particularly at this price and with these options – is the quality of the preamps, which sound excellent. Focusrite have a proud tradition in this area, so perhaps this should have come as no surprise, but it's fair to say the sound these pres produce blows much of the competition out of the water.

Sure Saffire

Saffire's reputation will be enhanced by this latest addition, which offers a lot for the price but will comfortably fit in a laptop bag. Its zero-latency monitoring and high-quality D/A conversion provide pro options, but this interface is well within shooting range for even start-up studios. FM

FutureMusic VERDICT

BUILD
VALUE
EASE OF USE
VERSATILITY
RESULTS

Great pres, flexible I/O aplenty and intuitive software control. All in all, very impressive.

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