

# Roland SP-404SX | £289

Roland hit us with an updated version of the SP-404. *Dan 'JD73' Goldman* looks at what's new



### WHAT IS IT?

An upgraded version of the SP-404 sampler with SD card storage, improved sound engine, effects and other minor improvements

### CONTACT

Who: Roland UK  
Tel: +44 (0)1792 515 048  
Web: roland.co.uk

### HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 Compact and portable with battery power
- 2 Long sample times possible with high-capacity SD card
- 3 Sounds great and has some decent FX

The SP-404 was launched in 2005 and quickly gained fans for its no-nonsense, portable approach to sampling.

However, there were also many users and potential buyers that found the SP-404 frustrating to use for a wide range of different reasons.

There was much for such users to grumble about: patterns couldn't be copied easily without a computer and

card reader, only one effect could be used at a time, the display was small and cryptic, editing samples was hit-and-miss, phono jacks were used instead of jacks. And there were a couple of major sticking points – the pads weren't velocity-sensitive, nor could samples be mapped easily across an entire octave (as on an MPC).

With all this in mind, people are hoping for something much improved

with a new 404. So does the SX impress and do what's hoped of it?

### New look

Apart from the obvious aesthetic change from a silver to a grey case, and a new colour-changing display (that glows various colours representing your input level), you'd be hard pushed finding too many other noticeable alterations. One immediate downside to the new colour is that it makes it difficult in low light to read the labelling of the sockets on the front of the 404SX (the headphone, mic level and mic-in jacks) and also a few of the other function labels too.

New features include a Function button for accessing utility functions via the pads – press and hold the Function button and hit the pad to adjust in and out gain, save and load, select MIDI channels, copy and exchange sounds/patterns, import WAVs and AIFFs, auto-trigger sampling, and more. Other changes include the Pitch button, next to the display on the old 404, which has been replaced by a formant-shaping Voice Transform function for warping voices and other material on the 404SX. Additionally, the Vinyl Sim button of the old 404 has now been replaced by a DJFX looper that enables DJ-style pitching, looping and stuttering to simulate vinyl or CD deck functionality (this works great and is a lot of fun). The old effects are still there, but have been moved to the MFX menu. Included main effects (which now switch smoothly) are a low-pass filter with overdrive, a delay and an isolator that removes frequency content to isolate sounds in a loop.

### Do you take cards?

Other major changes involve the use of an SD card rather than compact flash, increasing the number of patterns the SX can hold on a card over the old model. Depending on the size of card used, sampling time can be up to 48 hours in stereo and 96 hours in mono! There's also a handy software wave converter app included with the hardware that enables you to import WAV/AIFF files from your computer and save them onto an SD card formatted for the SP-404SX.

This means the 404SX is also a great bet for playing long samples live. In addition, it appears that the sampling/sound quality has been improved. Whereas AIFFs and WAVs could be imported on the old 404, it



