

Rocked & Rated



Steinberg CI2



Korg SOS SR1



Group Test


Home recording solutions under £300

Tired of humming into your mobile phone to capture song ideas? Here are **four recording solutions from the hardware and software worlds that will help you** to make tracks

WORDS **STUART WILLIAMS**



Roland
V-Studio 20



Tascam DP-008

Back in 1978, if you wanted to make recordings you needed three things: a big-ass cigar, a questionable ponytail and enough money to fill a studio with recording gear. Tascam changed that a year later by bringing recording technology to the home, allowing hopeful musicians to make demos by the light of their lava lamps.

As other manufacturers followed suit, the age of home recording arrived, and has remained ever since. It made a journey from cassettes, with a brief stop at MiniDiscs, before settling in the realm of hard disk digital recording. Along the way, home computers snuck up from out of nowhere. Recording audio on a computer was sketchy to start with, but as hardware specs improved, making tunes instead of spreadsheets became a

realistic concept, then a standard. Your software gave you as many tracks and effects as your computer could handle, without needing a nest of wires to patch it all together.

This brings us to 2010, where portable recorders offer up a 'digital notepad' format for getting your ideas down. We've chosen two computer-based packages (Steinberg CI2 and Roland V-Studio 20), a standalone eight-digital-track (Tascam DP008) and a portable recorder (Korg SOS SR1). Studio time is money, so let the song-building commence... ■

**"PORTABLE RECORDERS
OFFER UP A 'DIGITAL
NOTEPAD' FORMAT"**



Flip the page to
find out which one
won our Group Test
head-to-head

Rocked & Rated



Korg SOS SR1 £234

Save our songs!

Memory
The 2GB Micro-SD card gives you about 200 minutes of recording time, and can be expanded up to 16GB



Overdubbing
Sound on Sound overdubs can be imported into a computer for more accurate mixing

Effects/rhythms
The SR1 uses Korg's REMS technology for its effects, and also includes onboard drum patterns

At a glance

Korg SoS SR1
TYPE: Portable recorder
FEATURES: SoS overdubbing, effects, drum patterns, built-in mic and speaker, Micro-SD slot
INPUTS: Guitar input, line in (3.5mm), mic input (3.5mm)
OUTPUTS: Headphones out (3.5mm)
POWER SUPPLY: Batteries, PSU (optional)
DIMENSIONS: [HxWxD] 135 x 70 x 33mm
CONTACT: Korg UK 01908 857100
WEB: www.korg.co.uk

Korg's SOS SR1 bridges the gap between handheld recorders, multi-track machines and computer-based setups. This wedge-shaped recorder houses effects and backing rhythms to help get your ideas down, but the most interesting feature is the Sound on Sound overdubbing. Enable this and you can create as many overdubs as the Micro-SD card will allow.

The SR1 captures one part at a time using the built-in mic, guitar input or an external mic.



Once you've set your tempo, rhythm and any desired effects, recording is simple. You can overdub your next part from the beginning or by defining a start point. Hitting 'Record' plays back your first part while you play

over the top, and this process is repeated until you're finished.

The files for each overdub are saved separately for importing into a computer package (a free download of Ableton Lite Korg Edition is provided) for mixing down. This is useful for making recordings in practice and gig environments that can then have effects, extra overdubs and editing applied later.

Conclusion: On paper, the SR1 looks perfect, but in use we found its sparse controls and

plentiful menus too fiddly to let it win. That said, the effects and drum rhythms are more than useable for demos, and we love the fact that Korg has accommodated computer users, too. A USB interface would have been a great addition. Greedy? Perhaps, but judging by the competition, we're allowed to be.

SUMMARY

For: Portable, well thought out
Against: A bit fiddly to use

★★★★☆

TG says: Over-dub-dub

Tascam DP-008 £279

Stand-alone ranger

Control
The DP-008 offers plenty of hands-on control with its array of knobs and switches



Effects
The built-in reverb is great, but we'd like to see some more effects included

Inputs
The mix of jacks and XLR sockets means you're covered for recording most things

At a glance

Tascam DP-008
TYPE: 8-track digital recorder
FEATURES: 8 tracks, Reverb effect, EQ, tuner, metronome
INPUTS: 2x jack (line/guitar), 2x XLR (mic)
OUTPUTS: Line out (RCA), headphones (3.5mm)
POWER SUPPLY: Batteries, PSU (optional)
DIMENSIONS: [HxWxD] 35 x 215 x 124mm
CONTACT: Tascam 0845 130 2511
WEB: www.tascam.co.uk

This eight-track recorder represents the most traditional method of home recording. It follows the mould that made Tascam's popular Porta-Studios a success: it has a mixer section, transport controls for starting recording, and playback and Rec. The multi-track format is brought up to date with an LCD screen, digital tuner, metronome and onboard reverb processor.

You can record on two of its eight tracks at once at guitar/



line/mic level, it's equipped with both jack sockets and XLR inputs (a must for using phantom-powered condenser mics) and there's a built-in stereo condenser mic, too. Recording

with hardware doesn't get much more intuitive than this. Each track has its own Level, Pan and Reverb control to save you delving into a directory of menus. Once you're plugged in, you set your level, arm the track you want to record on and hit 'Record'. When you're done, you can create a final mixdown file.

Like the Korg, this unit records .wav files to an SD card (2GB included) that can be transferred to a computer over USB for editing/storage/CD burning.

Conclusion: This is the computer-phobe solution. You're limited to eight tracks, but that's more than enough for demos. While having Reverb as the only effect seems a bit limiting, and there's no software here, the DP-008's fast and hands-on performance makes up for it.

SUMMARY

For: Hands on, quick recording
Against: No computer software

★★★★☆

TG says: For the computer-phobes

"ROLAND'S V-STUDIO 20 SEAMLESSLY INTEGRATES THE HARDWARE INTERFACE AND INCLUDED SOFTWARE"

HOME RECORDING UNDER £300 **★ GROUP TEST**

Steinberg CI2

Track record **£195**

Cubase AI Steinberg's included Cubase AI software gives you tons of tracks and effects



Controls
The simple control layout means you can get recording quickly

USB powered
The CI2 is powered from your computer's USB port for recording almost anywhere

At a glance

Steinberg CI2

TYPE: Audio interface
FEATURES: Cubase AI included
INPUTS: 2x mic/line combo sockets
OUTPUTS: 2x balanced jack outputs
SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: PC: Windows XP (SP3), Windows Vista, Windows 7 Mac: OSX 10.5.5 or later
POWER SUPPLY: USB powered
DIMENSIONS: [HxWxD] 42 x 190 x 132 mm
CONTACT: Steinberg 0049 40 42236 115
WEB: www.steinberg.net

Steinberg has long been onto a winner with its Cubase software – it works on PC and Mac, and has proven itself to be the perfect route into computer recording. Since being bought by Yamaha in 2005, Steinberg has also added a range of hardware interfaces to its catalogue, like the USB-powered CI2 we're testing here. It's bundled with Cubase AI for a complete out-of-the-box recording solution.

The CI2 has two combo jack/XLR sockets, and Input 1 is



equipped with a high-impedance switch for guitar-level signals. Also onboard is phantom power, gain controls for the inputs, and Master, Headphone and Mix volume controls. The large AI knob lets you control onscreen

parameters like volume or pan settings, in place of a mouse.

Cubase AI, a cut-down version of the full software, provides up to 48 audio, 16 software instrument and 64 MIDI tracks simultaneously. You can also insert eight effects on each audio channel and create eight 'send' effects to apply globally. That epic orchestra and chorus of monks are right in your reach.

Conclusion: The sturdy hardware and jaw-droppingly powerful software (it's free,

remember!) makes the CI2 a brilliant solution for recording your guitar. It's flexible, powerful, and, best of all, easy to use. The only drawback is that you might not get near the full track and effect count if your computer isn't up to it, but its features are the best we've seen so far. There's more to come, though...

SUMMARY

For: Dual-platform, loads of tracks
Against: You need computer power

★★★★☆

TG says: Log on, rock out

Roland V-Studio 20 **£259**

Virtual insanity

Software Cakewalk's Guitar Tracks software lets Windows users get recording straight out of the box



Boss effects
You get access to a host of Boss COSM based effects here

Sockets
The input sockets on the side can be used for guitar, line instruments or mics



At a glance

Roland V-Studio 20

TYPE: Audio interface
FEATURES: Guitar Tracks and VS Editor included
INPUTS: Mic, guitar, 2x line in
OUTPUTS: Line out (RCA), USB
SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: PC: Windows XP, Windows Vista, Windows 7 Mac: OSX 10.5 or later (editor only)
POWER SUPPLY: USB
DIMENSIONS: [HxWxD] 38 x 290 x 145mm
CONTACT: Roland UK 01792 702701
WEB: www.roland.co.uk

V-Studio operates in a similar arena to the CI2. Connect the VS-20 hardware to your computer (PC/Mac running OS X 10.5) and it works as an audio interface and control surface for the included Cakewalk Guitar Tracks software (Windows only). The V-Studio 20's secret weapon, however, is the VS-20 Editor, a separate program that hosts a range of Boss effects.

We got recording straight away with the VS-20 and Guitar



Tracks installed on a modest netbook running Windows Vista, and it worked without glitches. The editor software looks familiar; it's like an onscreen Boss multi-effects unit, loaded with a

wide range of amp models and effects plus a vocal harmoniser/pitch correction processor.

In Guitar Tracks, you can record your guitar on one of the 32 audio tracks by plugging into the hardware interface, selecting effects in the VS-20 Editor, and then recording your guitar part. From here you can add extra effects from the software.

Conclusion: With so many features, the VS-20 could be confusing. However, Roland has

made it a doddle to use. The seamless integration between the hardware interface and included software takes away the feeling of using a computer without losing any of its benefits. It's just unfortunate that OS X users won't be able to make use of the Guitar Tracks software.

SUMMARY

For: Interface-quality effects
Against: Not ideal for Mac users

★★★★☆

TG says: Simply V-best