# M-Audio Fast Track C400 £175

M-Audio's Fast Track range has proven hugely popular. *Jono Buchanan* tests the newest addition

## WHAT IS IT?

A desktop interface and studio monitoring system

### CONTACT

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#### HIGHLIGHTS

1 High-quality recording spec 2 Multiple monitor command system 3 Neat design

#### SPECS

System Requirements
PC: Windows Vista 32/64 or
Windows 7 32/64, Pentium
4 2.0GHz, 1GB RAM, USB
2.0 port

Mac: OS X 10.5.8 or 10.6.3 or greater, 1GB RAM, USB 2.0 port, 24-bit/96kHz audio resolution

## Device:

4-input/6-outputs 2x mic/line combo preamps 2x 1/4" instrument inputs Phantom power 4 balanced analogue 1 headphone output S/PDIF digital I/O 1x1 MIDI I/O Master volume and headphone output knobs 1 assignable Multi button USB 2.0 bus-powered (compatible with USB 3.0)

ven before Avid completed their buy-out of M-Audio, the relationship between the latter's audio interfaces and

the software giants responsible for Pro Tools was strong. The M-Powered range of interfaces brought low-cost, high-quality audio recording and compatibility to a market previously out-priced by Pro Tools' financial entry-level. Chief among these was the Fast Track series which offered great audio quality at affordable prices and the subject of this review, the C400, is the latest interface in the Fast Track range. It's unrecognisable from the original Fast Track half-rack modules in appearance but does this facelift stretch to functionality as well?

## **Desktop slick**

As you can see from the image above, the C400 has become a desktop interface with audio interface controls on its shinier, left-hand side and a more comprehensive monitoring control system on the right. In terms of connectivity, the C400 features a

four-input/six-output configuration, with twin combi ports on the back panel which allow for either XLR microphone connections, or line level sources. Also round the back, you'll find twin pairs of line outs as well as S/PDIF input and output ports. MIDI In/Out and the USB port which carries data and provides bus-power completes the rear patchbay.

Along the front edge, connections continue, with twin instrument inputs and a headphone port. On the upper surface, all of this connectivity can be controlled with the twin input channels each featuring their own Gain control, along with a 20dB Pad and another to select whether your input source is taken from the front (instrument) or rear (mic/line) inputs. Phantom Power can be enabled for both channels at the top of a pair of LED ladders which keep you in touch with input levels.

# Over and output

The matt-finished right-hand side of the upper surface concerns output routing, with a prominent Volume dial giving you easy control over levels. Buttons above

this allow you to toggle between outputs 1-2 and 3-4, so the interface is readily set up to switch between twin monitoring systems. While they will run simultaneously for quadrophonic setups, it's not possible to split outputs 1-2 or 3-4 into mono, for sending signals to a patchbay, for example. After installation from the bundled CD, you'll find a Control Panel application which allows you to configure ins, outs and internal routings, with four input faders, pan controls and full metering on one side and six software return channels on the other.

There are built-in effects too to allow performers to hear monitor reverb and delay, with eight algorithms spanning Rooms, Halls, Plate, Delay and Echo. As you'd hope and expect, recording quality is sumptuous, with the signal conversion crisp and clear, all of which adds up to a winning package. If you're concerned that the C400 doesn't offer quite the depth of I/O your studio requires, the more generously appointed C600 might be more the ticket but, whichever you choose, Fast Track just got even slicker. FM



