



## Cakewalk V-Studio 20 £259

An audio interface and software controller compete with Roland COSM amp sims and effects *by Trevor Curwen*

With the vast choice of audio interfaces and recording software out there, making a start in computer-based recording may seem a little daunting to some. The whole process would become easier, however, if you could buy an integrated, easy-to-use package that provides all the essentials you need to get started – exactly the thinking behind the Cakewalk V-Studio 20, which has the words ‘designed for guitar players’ proudly displayed on the front of its packaging. That’s us then!

Cakewalk is a music software maker that’s been closely associated with (and partly owned by) Roland for several years now and the Cakewalk by Roland V-Studio 20, to give it its full name, combines Cakewalk’s Guitar Tracks 4 recording software with a hardware audio interface/control surface made by Roland and equipped with COSM amp sims and effects, plus more COSM signal processing dedicated to vocal recording. The idea is that the hardware and software integrate fully straight out of the box, allowing you to just plug in and be able to

record your guitar (and voice) with a fully-produced sound.

Now, Guitar Tracks 4 is Windows-only and may not be everyone’s first choice of software, but that’s no reason to write off the VS-20, as the hardware part of the package is, as well as being a guitar processor, very much a universal audio interface and control surface (Mackie Control protocol) that can be used with Macs and other software recording programs.

The V-Studio 20 hardware offers a two in/two out USB audio connection to your computer and has a dedicated guitar/bass input, a stereo line input and an XLR mic input

with phantom power. There’s also an onboard stereo microphone. Monitoring can be done using headphones, or by connecting the unit’s stereo output to powered speakers or whatever sound system you use. The hardware has no display of its own, but you can see all of the 50 editable onboard COSM presets and the edited user patches in the dedicated VS-20 software editor with its four virtual pedal modules (compression, overdrive/distortion, chorus/mod, delay) plus separate delineated sections for amp selection and controls, plus reverb.

Besides the COSM switching, input selection switches and a

button to call up the software tuner, there are loads of hardware controls dedicated to controlling Guitar Tracks 4 or your own software. There are a set of standard transport buttons for record, start, stop, rewind, fast forward and return to zero, plus eight faders for track volume with associated track selection buttons. The Guitar Tracks 4 software has 32 recording tracks and this is reflected by four Track Group buttons that select four separate groups of eight tracks. The faders and track selection buttons are assigned to these tracks, so you have hardware control of all 32 of them.

### The Rivals

Other units that feature an audio interface, control surface and guitar processing in one box are digital multitrackers – the **Zoom R16** (£399) and the **BOSS BR-800** (£399). Without control surface support, audio interfaces with guitar processing facilities include **Digidesign’s Eleven Rack** (£819) and the **Line 6 POD Studio** series (from £69). More common are the FX pedals with built-in audio interfaces. If you don’t need a mic input, but the COSM amp sims and FX appeal, then you need look no further than the **BOSS ME-25** (£169).



Cakewalk V-Studio 20 offers 36 genuine BOSS effects

### In Use

After installing the various supplied software items including audio drivers and the VS-20 editor, you're ready to go – no mains power is needed, as the VS-20 hardware takes its power from your computer via USB. Because the VS-20 editor functions in stand-alone mode, you can plug in a guitar and start playing through the COSM sounds just as soon as you have booted it up, allowing you to just use it for practice as well as in conjunction with your recording software. The Direct Monitoring knob sends the sounds directly to the hardware's output, so you can hear your playing with no latency delay. And when you want to bring your recording software into play, this knob can balance your live playing against the level of the computer's audio output, set by a separate DAW Output knob.

The nicely selected range of COSM presets are easily edited from the VS-20 Editor window, especially when you engage its Detail button to let you see which effect is assigned to each virtual pedal and, if you have one, you can plug in an expression pedal for control over volume or wah. 12 amp models provide a cross-section of popular makes and models and there are a goodly selection of effects (Cakewalk say there are 36 genuine BOSS effects) so you can dial in just about all the electric guitar sounds you're likely to need on a day-to-day basis and there are also utility presets that can convert guitar sound to bass and provide acoustic guitar simulation. Vocals can likewise get the COSM treatment with pitch correction and harmony generation available.



The software makes PC recording as simple as you could hope for



The VS-20 software features four dedicated pedal modules

If you have your own mic for vocals, plugging it into the VS-20's mic input will yield the best results but you can sing into the onboard mics and get a decent sound. The onboard mics actually work really well in capturing the sound of a band in the room and will also record an acoustic guitar in an assured manner. That said, it's slightly disappointing that Roland didn't think to put a mic stand mount on the baseplate to aid positioning. For hands-free recording (and a range of other assignable functions), you can add footswitches to the system.

Everything on the hardware interface works seamlessly with Guitar Tracks 4, which is as good an introduction to computer recording software as any – Cakewalk says that it's designed for guitarists and singer-songwriters, and specifically for users who are just getting started with PC recording or who want a very simple and streamlined application to quickly record ideas. While it may not be as sophisticated as the fully-spec'd versions of Cubase, Logic or Cakewalk's own Sonar (available as an upgrade from Guitar Tracks), it provides all the basic facilities that you need for recording, editing, mixing

and finalizing your music. Included are a suite of 11 effects for use when mixing, Roland's TTS-1 software synth for playing MIDI files and 1GB of backing tracks content in a wide variety of styles – over 250 backing tracks, including 18 complete songs.

The audio interface and controller portions of the package work flawlessly with other DAWs too – Cakewalk's website provides software for using the VS-20 as a controller for Logic and GarageBand on the Mac and we got that up and running in seconds.

### Verdict

The V-Studio 20 simplifies the whole process of computer recording, offering a neat overall package that will get you recording guitar and vocals on a PC in no time at all.

If you already have different recording software or are a Mac user, the fact that you won't be using Guitar Tracks 4 is not an issue as the V-Studio 20 still offers excellent value for money in that you are getting an audio interface, software controller and guitar processor all wrapped up in a compact package that just needs USB power from your computer to operate. **G**

### The Bottom Line

**We like:** Ease of use; hardware control of software; COSM amp sims and effects; built-in mics

**We dislike:** Bundled software is PC-only

**Guitarist says:** Audio interface, control surface and guitar and vocal processing all in one unit – affordable and practical



### Cakewalk V-Studio 20

**PRICE:** £259

**ORIGIN:** Japan

**TYPE:** Audio interface/software control surface/guitar processor

**DSP:** Maximum 24-bit (depending on software)

**SAMPLING FREQUENCY:** 44.1kHz

**INPUT CHANNELS:** Two

**CONNECTIONS:** XLR mic input x 2, 6.4mm Hi-Z guitar input, 6.4mm line inputs (L&R), RCA phono line outputs (L&R), stereo 6.4mm jack headphone output, USB 2.0 port, footswitch socket, expression pedal socket

**PHANTOM POWER:** Yes

**EFFECTS:** 50 presets

**EFFECTS TYPES:**

Comp/FX: compressor, limiter, pedal wah, T wah, pre EQ, slow gear, single hum, hum single, AC sim, radio voice. OD/DS: booster, natural, OD-1, blues, distortion, metal, core, fuzz, bass drive, vocal. Modulation: chorus, flanger, phaser, tremolo, pan, rotary, Uni-V, three-band EQ. Delay: single, pan, stereo, modulate, analog, tempo. Reverb: room, hall

**OTHER FEATURES:** Tuner, stereo microphone

**DIMENSIONS:** 299 (w) x 144 (d) x 53mm (h)

**POWER REQUIREMENTS:**

USB bus power

**OPTIONS:** BOSS FS-5U single and BOSS FS-6 dual foot switches. Roland EV-5, BOSS FV-500L and FV-500H expression pedals

**INCLUDED SOFTWARE:** Cakewalk Guitar Tracks 4

**COMPUTER SYSTEM**

**REQUIREMENTS:** See Cakewalk website ([www.cakewalk.com](http://www.cakewalk.com))

**Roland UK**

01792 702701

[www.roland.co.uk](http://www.roland.co.uk)



### Test results

**Build quality** ★★★★★  
**Features** ★★★★★  
**Sound** ★★★★★  
**Value for money** ★★★★★

**GUITARIST RATING** ★★★★★