



Steinberg Sequel 3 £68

PC MAC

This friendly entry-level DAW is moving with the times, ushering in new instruments, plug-in support and more

> Sequel is one of those products on which the spotlight only seems to fall when it's been given a major update – for the rest of the time, it just bubbles away in the background doing its thing. Granted, Steinberg have supported their entry-level recording software with additional content sets, but it doesn't have the profile of Apple's GarageBand, to which it's comparable.

This isn't to belittle what the package offers, which for newcomers to the world of computer music is quite a lot. Predictably enough, it can handle audio and MIDI, and lets you record, edit and mix in a manner that will be familiar to anyone who's used a traditional-style DAW before. Furthermore, there's plenty of bundled sound and loop content to keep you busy.

Sequel has always worked well as a standalone package, but one of our previous criticisms has related to its lack of plug-in support. Our hopes were raised when we heard that it had been added to version 3, but the bad news is that this extends to VST3 plug-ins only. This means that a whole raft of popular effects and instruments aren't compatible with the software (see the VS-Tease box below for more details on this).

The good news, though, is that this has allowed Steinberg to up the ante in regard to supplied plug-ins: the HALion Sonic SE workstation (which supplies more than 500 sounds), Groove Agent One drum tool and the VST Amp Rack SE guitar tone all come included,

giving the software greater flexibility and a more professional feel. All three of these are impressive for a package at this price range, and HALion Sonic SE is especially good, with its large bank of slick, ready-to-go sounds.

Painless percussion

Groove Agent One powers another key addition: the Beat page. Select a Beat track and a step sequencer appears at the bottom of the interface, with the Groove Agent One GUI positioned to the right. Using this, it's easy to build up numbered drum patterns, and these can all be dragged into the arrange window. So, users now have a fun and intuitive way to put together rhythm tracks.

Sequel 3 also introduces a performance mode: you can define song sections and assign them to pads so that they can be triggered by your MIDI controller or QWERTY keyboard. It's a nice way of extending the software's reach into the live realm, and the fact that you can record your performances means that this mode is also useful when you want to experiment with different arrangements in the studio.

Finally, there's now automatic tempo detection of imported MP3s, plus new step envelopes that enable you to apply effects (including reverse, pitch and stutter) to sections of audio – handy for jazzing up transitions, creating grooves or making remixes. It's a bit like Clip Envelopes in Ableton Live.

Sequel 3 is a capable entry-level DAW, and its users have the added advantage of knowing that their projects will open in Cubase too. Crucially, the workflow is easy, though we had to hover the mouse over some of the more mysterious icons before we understood what they represented. The big problem remains the lack of full plug-in support, but you can't argue with what Sequel 3 offers out of the box. **cm**

Web www.steinberg.net
Contact via website

Alternatively

Acoustica Mixcraft 5
cm151 » 9/10 » £69

Approachable PC DAW that's been smartly improved as it's matured

Apple GarageBand '11
cm160 » 8/10 » £46

Super-easy DAW, free with new Macs, or with the £46 iLife suite

Verdict

For Performance mode is fun
Impressive new instruments and effects
Quick and easy Beat page
VST 3 plug-in support...

Against ...But no VST 2.x support
Some interface elements are confusing

Fun to use and provides plenty for your money, but Sequel is compromised by three-legged plug-in support

7/10

VS-Tease

Steinberg kickstarted the plug-in revolution in 1996 with the first version of the VST – Virtual Studio Technology – standard. This was updated to v2.0 in 1999 (allowing instruments as well as effects), followed by v3.0 in 2008 and v3.5 in 2011.

The thing is, Sequel 3 doesn't work with VST plug-ins earlier than v3.0, which is actually the vast majority of them. This is a curious decision on Steinberg's part; Sequel is undoubtedly a beginner's app, but it's

incapable of hosting almost all free or low-cost plug-ins – exactly the sort of plug-ins that many of its users will want to use.

Steinberg told us that as VST support is new for Sequel, they didn't see the need for backwards compatibility. However, we'd argue the opposite: customers who are unfamiliar with VST may wrongly assume that compatibility with the latest version automatically means that they'll be able to run everything that came before as well.