



# Line 6 POD Studio UX2 USB audio interface £148

Line 6 raises the stakes in the computer-based amp simulation game with an integrated system specifically designed for recording guitar *by Trevor Curwen*

**W**e know Line 6 mainly for its now 10-year-old POD series, but even before the company released a hardware unit it had a software amp simulation product in the Amp Farm plug-in that worked solely with Digidesign's Pro Tools TDM versions. Line 6 has now gone back to the farm, or at least revived the name, with the new POD Farm software that can work as a plug-in with any recording software as it is available in RTAS, VST and AU formats.

POD Farm can be bought as software only. Two versions are available: POD Farm and POD Farm Platinum – both using the Pace iLok system as an authorisation dongle that will, no doubt, suit computer recordists who wish to have Line 6 amp sounds without having to buy Line 6 hardware. The other way to get hold of POD Farm, however, is to buy one of the three new POD Studio packages, which appear to offer excellent value for money.

POD Studio consists of the POD Farm software bundled with a Line 6 audio interface, which, as well as doing the I/O duty, also acts as an authorisation dongle. There are three versions of POD Studio available, each with a different USB audio interface – POD Studio GX, POD Studio UX1 and POD Studio UX2, which we have for review here.

If the whole deal looks a bit familiar that's because Line 6 previously packaged similar audio

interfaces (the TonePort GX, UX1 and UX2 models) with its GearBox software. The difference, though, is that the new interfaces are optimised for USB 2.0, which improves data transfer speeds, and that POD Farm software is more dedicated to recording than GearBox was. The phrase trainer and programmable drums from GearBox are nowhere to be seen but POD Farm has plug-in capability as standard rather than an add-on (GearBox users had to upgrade to GearBox plug-in). POD Farm also offers more versatility in that it offers dual amp capability with a signal path that can run through two full rigs of amps, cabs and effects. Line 6 has likened the difference

between GearBox and POD Farm to the difference between a PODxt and a PODx3.

The UX2 is the highest specified of the three audio interfaces. The only one of the three to feature VU meters, the UX2 also sports a pair of XLR mic inputs, a pair of 6.4mm line inputs plus two guitar inputs – one normal and one for instruments with active pickups. The USB connection to computer allows for two separate stereo

recording paths and monitoring is either via headphones or analog outputs that can be connected to your monitoring system. As with other Line 6 interfaces, the UX2 features the Tone Direct monitoring system that allows you to hear the processed guitar sound with no latency delay problems.

The POD Farm software in the POD Studio package has 18 guitar amps, 24 guitar cabs, five bass amps and cabs, 29 stompboxes and studio effects and six mic preamps. Also included as part of the package is the FX Junkie model pack that adds another 35 effects. If you wish to expand the capabilities further, there are more model packs available to effectively upgrade the system to the equivalent of POD Farm Platinum, which has the same number of guitar cabs and mic preamps as POD Farm but ups the rest of the model count to 78 guitar amps, 28 bass amps, 22 bass cabs and 97 stompboxes and effects.

## In Use/Sounds

The first thing to note about the software is the cool graphical user interface featuring realistic representations of all the models. The signal chain is seen clearly in the bottom window of the display while the top window can show various options, the most impressive being a carousel-style gear browser where you can move

Whatever element of the sound you record, the ToneDirect monitoring system allows you to always hear the processed sound as you play



The POD Farm software offers extensive preset capabilities

## The Rivals

If you want separate hardware and software there are plenty of USB audio interfaces on the market as well as amp simulation software but you would not get the monitoring and routing options offered by POD Studio. Hardware/software packages include **Native Instruments Guitar Rig 3 Kontrol Edition** (£399), a software amp rig with foot controller/USB interface, and the **Zoom ZFX Stack Package** (£169), a Windows only system that offers the ZFX Plug-In with the S2t audio interface.





The POD Farm's mixing desk



There are 18 guitar amps and 24 guitar cabs to choose from

all the models along like the Generation Game conveyor belt and simply drag and drop one into the signal chain. Alternatively, the top window can show the panel of any amp or effect in the signal chain, allowing tweaking of its controls with your mouse, or it can show the list of presets, the chromatic tuner or a mixer that determines the routings and levels of various signals transmitted to and from the computer.

POD Farm provides the most popular of Line 6's quality amp sims with a range of amps and cabs for guitar and bass plus the most-used effects that would cover the majority of guitar recording tasks. The extra FX Junkie model pack increases the creative potential with 35 effects models that include delays, choruses, compressors, distortions, and more esoteric stuff such as synths and filters. A myriad of sounds are available from just a simple signal path with stompboxes, amp, cabinet and studio effects but Dual Tone offers the chance to have two parallel signal paths for more flexibility – like playing through an AC30 and a Fender at the same time.

Loads of factory presets offer instant access to usable sounds,

many based on individual songs or particular players and some with the Dual Tone set-up.

POD Farm can be used as a plug-in inserted into a software-recording track or it can just be used as a stand-alone program if you simply wish to play. With the UX2 you can also record POD Farm sounds directly to a recording track. When recording there is great flexibility about just what signal is actually recorded. The two stereo recording paths via USB can both work at once so you can have the luxury of recording the sounds from two different points in the signal chain to separate tracks. Each recording path has a choice of recording the fully processed sound, a semi-processed sound (amp, cab, compressor, EQ and effects positioned before the amp only) or a completely dry guitar sound from the input – something that will allow you to keep your options open and use POD Farm as a plug-in to process the sound later. If you are recording a Dual Tone Sound, each path gives you the choice of recording Tone 1, Tone 2, a mix of the two or the dry sound. Whatever element of the sound you choose to record, the ToneDirect monitoring system

allows you to always hear the full processed sound as you play.

As an audio interface the UX2 provides a clean signal path for audio coming back from your computer and for the inputs. The XLR inputs have phantom power so can accommodate condenser mics for quality vocal recording where the signal can be nicely polished by routing through the vocal preamp and compressor models, and, with two mic inputs, stereo recording is possible.

Overall what you get with POD Studio UX2 is integrated hardware and software, perfectly focused on recording guitar while streamlining the process.

## Verdict

Any one of the POD Studios would be a great value package for anyone who wants to use a computer for recording and maybe a bit of practice. Not only do you get the audio interface and an excellent (and expandable) library of guitar sounds but also a version of Ableton Live 7 Lite with 16-track recording capability so you can start recording straight away. Of the three packages POD Studio UX2, with the largest array of inputs, offers the greatest amount of flexibility – for less than £150 you really can't go wrong. **G**



The UX2 and POD Farm software has plug-in capability



## Line 6 POD Studio UX2

**PRICE:** £148

**TYPE:** USB audio interface with VU meters

**ORIGIN:** China

**SAMPLING FREQUENCY:** 44.1, 48, 88.2, 96kHz

**BIT RATES:** 24 bit

**CONNECTIONS:** 1/4-inch instrument input x 2, 1/4-inch line input x 2, balanced XLR inputs x 2 (with phantom power), 1/4-inch stereo monitor input, balanced 1/4-inch line out x 2, 1/4-inch stereo headphone out, S/PDIF digital out, USB, footswitch sockets x 2

**CONTROLS:** Channel 1 gain, channel 2 gain, output volume, phones output volume

**DIMENSIONS:** 256 (l) x 154 (w) x 77mm (h)

**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 0.62/1.7

**POWER REQUIREMENTS:** USB

**EXTRAS:** USB cable, Ableton Live Lite 7 software, Reason Adapted software, Riffworks T4 software

**OPTIONS:** None

**RANGE OPTIONS:** POD Studio GX (£67), POD Studio UX1 (£102), Metal Shop Model Pack (\$49), Collector Classics Model Pack (\$49), Power Pack Model Pack (\$49), Bass Expansion Model Pack (\$99), POD Farm software (£74), POD Farm Platinum software (£228)

## SOFTWARE

**MODELS:** 18 guitar amps, 24 guitar cabs, five bass amps and cabs, 29 stompboxes and studio effects (+35 from FX Junkie model pack) and six mic preamps.

**FORMATS:** Mac AU/RTAS/VST, Windows RTAS/VST

**SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:** See website

**Line 6**

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## The Bottom Line

**We like:** Flexible connectivity and routing; great complement of Line 6 sounds; Dual Tone capability; VFM

**We dislike:** No pad switch on mic inputs

**Guitarist says:** Affordable, easy-to-use and sounds great – it's the complete package for recording guitar on computer

## Test results

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

**GUITARIST RATING** ★★★★★