



Digidesign Eleven £382

PC MAC



An amp sim from Digi is surely intended to be a very serious tool indeed, but at least they're having some fun with the name of it...

System requirements

PC Digidesign-qualified system
(Pro ToolsHD Accel or Pro Tools
LE/M-Powered system running
Pro Tools 7.1 or higher),
iLok (not included), internet access

Mac Digidesign-qualified system
(Pro ToolsHD Accel or Pro Tools
LE/M-Powered system running
Pro Tools 7.1 or higher),
iLok (not included), internet access

Test system

Mac G5 Dual 2.5GHz, 3GB RAM,
OS X 10.4.11, Pro Tools M-Powered,
M-Audio Audiophile 192

> Named presumably after the classic *Spinal Tap* moment, the moniker of this brand-new guitar amp simulator from Digidesign would suggest that it has an innate ability to reproduce full-on rock tones. Eleven comes in TDM, RTAS and AudioSuite flavours, although a so-called LE version is available too, which has exactly the same features but doesn't include the TDM plug-in.

Eleven sports emulations of ten classic vintage guitar amps and two that are entirely of Digi's own design - see the boxout for further details. Each amp has its own head controls and Digidesign have been very faithful in their reproduction. For example, the AC30 model has both Normal and Brilliant channels and, like the original, the Treble and Bass tone controls only work on the latter, while the Cut (presence) and tremolo module work on both. Where amp channels can be ganged - or

'jumped' - in real life using a patch cable (to yield series or parallel use of two channels at once), they're generally modelled in a way that can reproduce these tones. However, you won't find any spring reverbs...

The real thing

The team at Digidesign were tireless in their sourcing of 'perfect' original specimens of the modelled amps, pinpointing the exact time periods of production and then thoroughly checking the innards for authenticity and originality of components. Their conscientiousness is rewarded in the precision and accuracy of the modelling, and the very natural interaction that's enabled between the player and the plug-in. It responds much as an amp would when you tweak the controls, and the quirks and peripheral noises are very 'real' too.



Top: Digi's emulation of the 1969 Marshall Plexiglass
Middle: The 1992 Mesa-Boogie Dual Rectifier Head
Bottom: The classic 1964 Fender Deluxe

As well as amps, there are seven cabs to choose from, including those that were intrinsically attached to the amps, such as that of the Fender Deluxe combo, or those that were classically associated, such as a 4x12 Marshall loaded with Celestions. Toggling through them, the impact and variety of their sound on the whole is quite a surprise – in fact, the raw sound of the amps with the cab switched to bypass is wholly unappealing!

A great guitar sound can be as much about imperfection as everything working in harmony, and to this end Digi have added a control to dial in speaker break-up, which is how the speaker responds and vibrates as the amp's power is increased. Introducing some of this into the sound brings an appealing thickness and fullness.

At the end of the virtual signal chain you have the choice of eight mics, from expensive favourites like the Neumann Valve U67 through to cheaper dynamics like the Shure SM57. You'll no doubt find your favourite mic and stick with it; the U67 is particularly rich. The mics can be either on- or off-axis, which is fine, but a variable slider with a choice of points in between would've been better. Likewise, double miking and a distance setting introducing 'air' and 'room sound' would also have been great. Of course, you can use multiple instances of Eleven to imitate a multi-mic setup, but the plug-in's hyper-realism doesn't come cheap and easy, as it absolutely devours CPU cycles. With just three instances of Eleven and no other plug-ins running, our test machine started to show the strain.

A noise gate rounds things off, quickly and efficiently getting rid of amp noise, making the sound tighter and punchier. A dedicated gate might be a more precise bet for the final mix, though.

Maximum overdrive

There's a clear American rock element to the general sound that becomes increasingly evident the more you use Eleven. You can effortlessly achieve big-bottomed and bright, fizzy, distorted tones of the classic rock variety, probably better than any amp emulator we've seen. To get an idea



Hard drivin'

Eleven's strengths clearly lie in hot, driven sounds, as, with a minimum of effort, it comes out with highly-convincing distortions.

King of the amps, we reckon, is the '89 SL-100, in particular the Drive channel. It's based on the Soldano SLO-100 and has all the fat bass and fizzing drive that's so loved by rockers like Aerosmith. Not only is the tone convincing, but all the extraneous noises – bumps and thumps, hums and buzzes – add up to gritty realism.

Up there with the SL-100 are the emulations of a Mesa Boogie Mark IIc+ and a Dual Rectifier. They have a more defined tone in the mid-range and a punchier presence in the mix, which is what makes amps like the Dual Rectifier

so popular with modern metallers.

Also in the premier league is the DC Modern Overdrive, a Digi original. It has the rich tone of the Soldano coupled with Mesa-like clarity, making it a good choice for big double-tracked parts.

The Marshall JCM800 emulation's rawness has buckets of old-school charm, bringing the likes of Hendrix to mind. For smaller, crunchier rhythm sounds, the '59 Tweed Lux – a Fender Deluxe, natch – has a very open tone that rides the mix well.

These are our personal favourites, but Eleven also includes Fender models numbering a Bassman, Deluxe Vibrato and Twin Reverb; a Marshall Super Lead; a Vox AC30 and another Digi Custom model called Vintage Crunch.

of the range of tones available from Eleven, hear some of the presets in action on the **cm** DVD.

A more dangerous and edgy element to the palette would be welcome, though – how about Pete Townshend's Hi-Watt, or the aggressive, raucous sounds of the Sex Pistols' Steve Jones or Kurt Cobain? There's plenty of rich bottom end to be had and the presence cuts through well, but that tight, ballsy sound in the lower-mids on less driven sounds – the tone that gives 'attitude' – seems elusive. Still, this is a deficiency we've found with other amp modellers too.

Ready to rock?

Digidesign's attention to detail in the development of Eleven pays off in the plug-in's highly flexible amp modelling environment, which reacts in much the same way as the real thing behaves. The big distortion sounds are exceptionally good, but the tendency toward a bright, smooth sound palette might not be to everyone's taste. Of course, you can always fire up your favourite distortion pedal inserts to further shape Eleven's sound, and this plug-in shouldn't appeal only to guitarists either – it's a useful effect when strapped across bass, keyboards, drums, or anything else you fancy. The quality of recreation and versatility coupled with 'so low it's unnoticeable' latency and convenient immediacy makes this an extremely handy tool to have in the box. **cm**

Contact Avid, 01753 655999

Web www.digidesign.com

Info Eleven LE (non-TDM version), £253

Alternatively

Line 6 Amp Farm 3

N/A >> N/A >> £418

A long-running product, and still a firm favourite in the industry, although it's TDM-only

NI Guitar Rig 3

9/10 >> cm120 >> £370

A monster guitar tool that's as well known for its effects as it is for its amps and cabs

Verdict

For Big, fat distortion sounds

Realistic user/amp interaction

Excellent cab emulations

Speaker break-up 'glues' the sound

Minimal latency

Against Sound could be a little more 'dangerous'

Predictable amp choice

Very CPU intensive

While it's not the most flexible amp sim, and it eats CPU cycles for breakfast, Eleven succeeds in particular where many others fail to cut the mustard, with juicy hard-rock tones

8/10