# Yamaha Motif-Rack XS | £1,000

It packs more punch than any Motif rack, but is that enough to satisfy the most demanding musicians? *Marc '01'* indulges in the powerful Motif-Rack XS

**ON THE DVD**

### WHAT IS IT?
A versatile multi-timbral sound module

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### HIGHLIGHTS
**1** Shed loads of essential sounds and presets
**2** Quick access editing knobs on the front panel
**3** Software editor for detailed programming

The Motif range is one of Yamaha's most successful products, with a long lineage of keyboard and rack versions catering to all conceivable needs and budgets. If your studio motto reads something along the lines of 'too much is never enough', then the XS could quickly become your rack of choice for instant sonic gratification.

The Motif-Rack XS is the current top-of-the-range rack model, and is equipped with the same sound engine and identical waveform ROM as the XS keyboard. However it differs from the keyboard version by lacking a couple of significant features – namely onboard sampling and multi-track sequencing.

I doubt anyone will miss the sequencer option too much, but we mourn the loss of the sampling option. This would greatly expand the scope for sound designers to utilise and mutilate their own waveforms in custom voices.

### Deep and skinny
As might be expected from a flagship product, build quality is up to scratch. The sturdy casing is all metal with reinforced front panel mounts. It might be a nice slim 1U-high but it's also exceptionally deep, extending back to a full 38cm.

The front panel sports a power/volume switch, headphone jack and an adequate-sized LCD with a wide viewing angle. Next along is the inevitable smattering of buttons for navigating and menu-diving. The audition button is a nice touch, press this and the Motif will play the patch using one of the many internal arp/phrase sequences.

This is complimented by a row of five knobs designed for real-time control of the most essential sound shaping parameters such as filter cutoff, amp envelope and EQ. These are grouped into four layers offering quick access to a total of 20 parameters.

Spinning to the rear we find two pairs of jack outputs, digital coaxial output plus the usual trio of MIDI ports.

### OK computer
The Rack-XS communicates with the computer via USB and seems equally happy whether plugged in to a hub or its own port. The USB connection is used by the software editor, and doubles up on MIDI duties providing two ports within the host sequencer.

Port one is reserved for the 16 Motif channels, while Port 3 can be used to send another 16 channels of data down the units MIDI Thru port. As you might have already guessed by the numbering

## No Pain – Just Gain – Software Editor

Every good rack synth deserves a trusty sidekick in the form of a decent, easy to use software editor. I'm pleased to report that Yamaha have delivered the goods on this one, which is pretty important since a lot of details can't be edited via the LCD and buttons on the hardware.

Installation is a two part process, which begins with the Yamaha Studio manager program. This acts as a central station for organising and editing all of the Yamaha equipment in your studio setup. Once this is up and running, users are ready for part two – installing each of the individual instrument editors.

There's no denying the Motif is a complex beast, so it's just as well that the editor does a good job of organising all data into logical window sets, which slide in and out of view when needed. The software has plenty of other clever little touches which make for a smoother, faster experience. One example is when you go to adjust a parameter knob, it zooms up in size making it easier to dial in precise values.

system, there is a Port 2, and for the record, a Port 4 as well. This pair is used to synchronise the software editor and should be deactivated in your DAW to avoid any weird behaviour.

### Band in a box

The XS continues the tradition of high-end PCM sound modules tempting buyers with the prospect of a one stop tone shop for all occasions.

At one end of the spectrum it offers performers and composers a complete stock of realistic acoustic and electric instrument emulations. Meticulously programmed for maximum expression and tastefully coated with effects, ready to drop in to a mix.

At the other end we find a fully-featured workhorse synthesizer. The several hundred presets range from classic mono-synth tones to rich, expansive textures, ideal for movie beds and emotive special effects. For ripping virtual analogue sounds, best look elsewhere. The raw sound of the waveforms is passable when covered in effects, but the filters sound way too cold and digital, especially when you start to dial up some resonance.

The stash of 1000 plus presets is certainly a major selling point for this unit. Two crucial factors are inherent in almost every patch I auditioned – excellent sound quality and dynamic playability. This easily ranks among the finest GM-style hardware sound modules available maki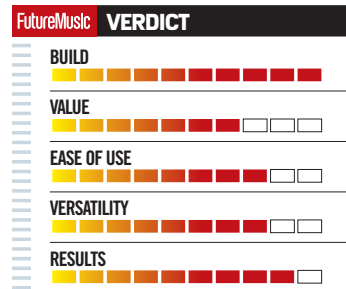ng it an obvious choice for mainstream music production and film score work. Another feature reinforcing this role is the library of phrase sequences and arpeggiator patterns. These work hand in hand with the presets to create instant backing tracks and drum beats in music styles including Pop, Latin, Rock and Jazz.

### Elemental excess

Beyond the allure of the presets lies a world of programmability. The architecture is typical subtractive synth style, but offers a wealth of detail. To give you an idea, a voice is assembled by stacking up to eight waveforms or 'elements' and each element is a complete synth in its own right.

As you can see, it's all about stacking those layers in interesting ways, and if you still need more, stack some voices together in a massive multi-set. With 128 notes of polyphony, you're pretty much guaranteed to hear every note played in its entirety.

### Conclusion

The XS outputs that distinctive Yamaha sound quality, which can be described as bright and crisp in the high ends, mellower in the mids and controlled in the bass end. The XS does have a few weaker points as we mentioned on route. It isn't expandable, and unlike the keyboard version there's no sampler. Other minor niggles include the sound cutting out abruptly when switching patches and limited programmability via the hardware. Aside from these points, it delivers nothing but the full Motif sound in a powerful little package. **FM**

> ## "Meticulously programmed and tastefully-coated with effects, ready to drop in to any mix"

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| | |
|---|---|
| BUILD | |
| VALUE | |
| EASE OF USE | |
| VERSATILITY | |
| RESULTS | |

**A portable rack full of high-quality sounds and presets for power hungry musicians.**