



Access Virus TI

Access reveal the long-awaited new addition to their classic Virus family. **Jono Buchanan** feels a fever coming on...

DETAILS

PRICE £1,199 Desktop Module, £1,499 Polar Module, £1,499 Keyboard version

CONTACT

Web: www.turnkey.co.uk
www.access-music.de

TECH SPEC

16-part multitimbral sound module
Dual DSP Core (accelerated from previous Virus engine)
6 outputs – 192kHz, 24-bit D/A converters
S/PDIF I/O
USB 2.0
Synth plug-in 'Virus Control' within host sequencer
New oscillators – Hypersaw, Wavetable
Increased polyphony
Independent delay and reverb
24-bit audio interface
MIDI interface

CHANCES ARE THAT if you're reading this, you own some sound-making gadgets. And what's more likely still is that at some stage, along with all of the gear you've bought to add functionality to your studio, you've splashed out on something truly original and spectacular, which has brought something out of the ordinary to your productions and which may have had the added benefit of inducing jealousy amongst your mates. You'll know what I'm talking about if you've ever owned a Virus.

Few synths enjoy the mix-ripping sonic potential of Access' range of synths, and for nearly a decade we've watched (and salivated) as these original wedge-shaped desktop instruments have grown keyboards, gathered new functions, added effects, increased polyphony, spawned arpeggiators and so on. If you own a Virus, you feel like part of a club – one of a group 'in the know'. Let me warn you that the latest instalment, the TI, is going to refresh all of those pangs of longing.

The Virus TI reaches us in three forms – as the aforementioned



In keeping with all things viral even the software looks nails – here, for example, the filter pane

desktop wedge, as a 61-key keyboard and as the Polar, a three-octave affair, which is perhaps the most desirable design of all. The Polar is dominated by bright white LEDs, and despite offering the same feature set as the wedge and keyboard versions, it just adds a little more 'wow' factor.

So, I hear you ask, 'what's 'TI' all about then'? Well, this is the seriously cool bit. Until now, unless you owned Virus as a Pro Tools or PowerCore plug-in, your Virus has

existed only as an external synth, hooked up to your sequencer as a MIDI module. No longer. 'TI' stands for 'Total Integration' – this Virus works as a synth, a software plug-in, an audio interface, a MIDI interface and as a control surface for your sequencer. And it does all of this at the same time. Hold on to your hats.

Sounds good

First or foremost though, the Virus TI remains a synth module, and if you want you can use it exclusively in

These days it's hard to find good hands-on control, although clearly not impossible!



that way. As such, it comes armed with four RAM banks of 128 sounds, and 17 banks of ROM sounds, which means you have a little over 2,500 presets just to get your started. And two new waveforms are available in this model. There's no question that on paper this is the best sounding Virus yet.

The first waveform, Hypersaw, is a kind of über-sawtooth affair – layering multiple sawtooth waves on top of one another to produce sounds to which the word ‘power’ does no justice. Alongside this, you’ll also find the new ‘Wavetable’ oscillator that allows ‘step-like’ sounds, either as cascades, sweeps or sample-and-hold type sounds.

Both features are fabulous additions and complement Virus’ awesome sound-making potential. The presets show the unit off wonderfully. If you make any kind of electronic music, there’s plenty for you here, from the warmest or growliest basses, to shimmering, ethereal pads, to searing leads and crunchy sequences.

Other improvements on offer here against previous Viruses include increased polyphony via Virus’ new dual-processor structure and a much-improved LCD backlight display with three soft knobs beneath, offering instant access to useful parameters for any preset loaded. Up to this point, all of this makes the Virus not only a wonderful synth to load into your rack – it will also enhance your live sound no end.

USB me!

But to use the Virus exclusively in this way is to deny yourself the sheer joy of connecting this monster to your computer. The unit ships with a software installer that loads the software plug-in version and audio drivers at the same time.

Installation is utterly painless, but be aware that the software that ships is likely to have been updated by the time you get the unit home.

Access seem to be posting updates with ‘fixes’ every few days, so keep your eyes peeled for improvements.

Once you’ve installed the software and rebooted, connecting the supplied USB cable is all that remains. I booted Logic, and after the AU Manager took a moment to recognise it had a new friend to play with, I was in. All you need do then is select the plug-in from the ‘Access’ submenu of virtual instruments and

Wooden end cheeks, stacks of knobs, great sound...

“THERE IS ABSOLUTELY NO QUESTION THAT THIS IS THE BEST SOUNDING VIRUS YET”

you’re away. A fully integrated Virus awaits you, with the synth engine broken down into 10 pages, which take you through from the oscillators at the beginning to the effects and routing options at the end.

Each stage is well-designed and unfussy, and the super-cool thing is that you can actually use the Virus unit itself to act as a controller for the plug-in. When it comes to writing automation this is so much more enjoyable than reverting to your mouse, and it means tweaking of several parameters at once becomes a serious possibility. Each page becomes almost self-explanatory when editing your sounds.

There was always the risk with

the Virus that as new functionality was added, the physical surface of the instrument would become cluttered and fiddly to use. Any such worries evaporate with the software version, and I’m certain that Access will use the hard/software approach as a benchmark for future products. The arpeggiator page typifies the simplicity of the interface, as you can select note lengths, velocities and swing values for each step in no time at all. Such a function is almost incomparably complicated on the unit itself.

Interfaced

No sooner have you caught your breath than the Virus presents its



Effects

ONE SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENT is that Virus now offers separate delay and reverb effects, which has ranked high on many Virus owners’ wish-list of improvements for some time. However, it’s also worth recapping on those effects already on offer, as this section of the instrument is as important a stage of the sound-making process as the oscillator and filter sections. Amongst the effects on offer you’ll find distortion, with variants from regular distortion, through saturation to bitcrushing, a phaser, a chorus/flanger, analog boost, ring modulation, a 32-band vocoder and 3-band EQ. There’s something for everyone here, from super-crunchy Benni Bennassi-style basses to warm, floaty retro phased pads. The effects section is one of the main beneficiaries of the software instance of the TI – potentially complicated effects routing is rendered straightforward.

ALTERNATIVES



ACCESS VIRUS CLASSIC £699

Want the Virus sound without splashing the cash? The Virus Classic could be the chap for you. There’s none of the software which accompanies the TI though, so this is ‘just’ a synth module. Still sounds great, though, and is half the price of the desktop TI.

www.access-music.de



CLAVIA NORDLEAD 3 RACK £1,349

The Nord range also enjoy a fearsome reputation for adding depth and substance to any production, and Version 3 of their Lead range certainly provides a memorable sound. The feature-set looks limited alongside the TI, though.

www.clavia.se



KORG TRITON EXTREME WORKSTATION £1,379

This is a different beast entirely, but it’s included as an alternative as it too features a vast array of features. Part synth, part sampler, part sequencer, it also enjoys USB connectivity. Much more of a jobbing live/workstation synth, though.

www.korg.com

REVIEWS ACCESS VIRUS TI

Improved screen and soft knobs make for easy programming



"THE MOST DESIRABLE PIECE OF TECHNOLOGY I'VE COME ACROSS FOR SOME TIME"

Now with the power to control Virus TI with software and hardware



▶ next treat. You can select the unit as your audio interface, so that all audio routes into and out of the unit itself. Obviously, there are no XLR inputs on the back, but if you have any kind of channel strip or preamp, this means that you can record any and all instruments through the Virus' 192kHz, 24-bit converters en route to your computer.

Two analogue and two S/PDIF inputs are available, so it is at last possible to make the Virus the centre of an all-digital studio. As you can see, Access don't shirk in their desire to make the 'Totally Integrated'

tag genuine. The same is true for the MIDI routing options, which allow the Virus to act as a kind of MIDI hub. MIDI can be passed through the unit en route to other synths and modules in your studio and as ever, this is painless to set up.

Summing up

The new Virus is impossible to dislike. So many of us run our studios in software alone and yet this unit is so desirable you'll be forced to at least reconsider your new-found sleek, minimalist approach.

We're all getting used to being able to buy a software synth for no more than a few quid and adding something useful to our set-ups that £1,200 looks like quite an outlay, but right off the bat you get a hardware synth, a software equivalent, an audio interface, a MIDI interface and a control surface, with support for other synths and sequencers planned for the latter. And this is before you've factored in the sounds which, were they hooded youths, you'd immediately issue with ASBOs.

Access haven't rested on their laurels. Despite the success of the Virus range up to this point, they've

Design aesthetics

THE PHYSICAL INTERFACE on the TI has been modified and improved from previous Virus incarnations, and these developments are worthy of mention.

The soft knobs below the screen offer a useful starting point, as does the bright shiny LCD screen, which updates the dated 2-line LCD affair of previous Viruses. More significantly, the desktop version features a rear-panel which can be rotated so the plugs and ports can be 'moved' to the bottom of the unit rather than languishing in an unreachable position when rack-mounted.

Alongside these modifications, Access have had some fun with this interface too. Both Polar and keyboard versions of the TI feature a rear-panel Access logo which is backlit. This can be set to pulse to either clocked on internal tempo, so that your virus 'throbs' in time with your music. Expect vibrate alerts and mirror balls in future download updates.

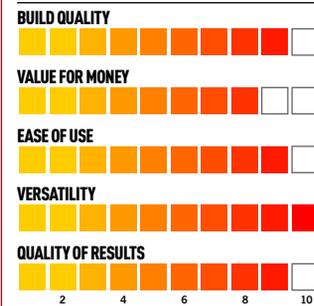
gone back to the drawing board for the TI, and I hugely respect them for coming up with so complete a solution here. Sure, there's still room for improvements, but I'm sure new tricks are in development. This is the most desirable piece of technology I've come across for some time – I urge you to check it out. **FM**

ON THE DVD



1. Monkfish Pad
2. Heaven Trance Lead
3. Go-Er Arp – in the first of three sequences, the Virus turns into Arp mode to provide a shadow loop.
4. Dub-Seq – here's a dub seq pattern.
5. Old-Skool Arp
6. Bass T I – and another Virus forte.

VERDICT ACCESS VIRUS TI



The charms of Virus TI are contagious. Beg, borrow or... okay, please don't steal one.



It's a synth, an audio interface, a MIDI interface, a controller...