COMPUTER MUSIC PERFORMANCE Award

VIDEO 2 MINUTES WITH...

XLN Audio DS-10 Drum Shaper

€90 PC MAC

The developers of Addictive Drums and Keys have created this spin-off transient processor – can it get us hooked?

> XLN Audio are best known for their Addictive series of sample-based drum and keyboard instruments, and one often-overlooked aspect of them is their excellent onboard effects processing. DS-10 Drum Shaper (VST/AU/AAX) is their first Addictive FX, a transient shaper that combines three drum-specific Modes (Kick, Snare and Bus) with a trio of shaping algorithms (Classic, Natural and Smooth).

The Mode is selected using the three buttons at the top, and the detection and applied gain curve are optimised for the named drum type. Bus is the most general-purpose option, working well with stereo drum mixes, while Snare and Kick are tailored to the frequency content and characteristic transient nature of those drums. The three algorithms influence the overall decay style, with Classic (the same as Addictive Drums 2's Shape processor) being quite aggressive and 'pumping', Natural more refined, and Smooth having the smoothest decay of all.

Transient lengthening and shortening is done via typical Attack and Sustain controls (+/-100% for each), and further enhancement is provided by the Mojo control, which affects a particular 'quality' depending on the Mode: Tightness in Kick Mode, Body in Snare Mode and Presence in Bus Mode. After this you get output Gain, followed by Soft Clip and Bypass buttons.

DS-10 also features a real-time input signal waveform display with an orange envelope trace indicating the gain applied by the transient shaper.

The shape of things to drum

The choice of algorithm has a more obvious impact on transient shaping than the Mode setting. Classic is by far the most coloured of the three; positive Sustain settings really emphasise tails of snares in that mode, for example. In contrast, thanks to its fast attack and initial post-transient release, the Natural algorithm is very transparent, enabling more careful emphasis of the tail with the Sustain control. Smooth shares the same fast response, but with a slightly gentler initial sustain.

One more consideration is that more transient gain is applied with the Natural and Smooth algorithms than Classic. The upshot of all of this is that the Natural and, to some extent, Smooth options deliver cleaner, punchier, louder transients than Classic, and this is most noticeable with kick drums, where Classic sounds positively lacklustre in comparison.

The Mojo knob introduces another layer of frequency-specific shaping that dovetails nicely with Attack and Sustain, and its tighter settings are brilliantly effective on kicks and snares, counteracting some of the frequency build-up that results from really long Sustain settings. In Bus Mode, meanwhile, Mojo (Presence) works well as an enhancer or harshness tamer on overheads, and we even had some success applying it to full-frequency sounds such as acoustic guitar, piano and electric bass.

Our only minor issues with DS-10 are the lack of input gain, simply to help with gain staging, and multiband operation (especially for Bus mode), which could be useful. Ultimately though, DS-10 is a very useful plugin, offering more targeted and effective tools for drum shaping than your typical transient shaper. **cm**

Web www.xlnaudio.com

Find your Mojo

Drum Shaper's bipolar Mojo control provides tailored shaping of its three Modes, and it has a pretty audible effect, even with the Attack and Sustain settings at zero. By comparing processed and unprocessed channels, we can establish that the Presence (Bus) and Tightness (Kick) options influence high and low frequencies respectively. In Kick Mode, you can achieve much tidier (positive Mojo) or more flappy (negative Mojo) low frequencies, while Bus Mojo enhances or curtails high frequencies. The Snare setting is the most interesting, though, with positive Mojo really bringing up the mid-range thickness and negative shortening the decay.

XLN are fairly tight-lipped on what Mojo actually does, but they've indicated that it delivers frequency-focused transient shaping, and our findings certainly concur. Ultimately, Mojo complements traditional Attack and Sustain processing nicely, giving another mechanism for fine-tuning.

Alternatively

Softube Transient Shaper
cm218 » 9/10 » $99
Dual-band design with reasonable flexibility and good CPU efficiency

Waves Trans-X
N/A » N/A » $99
Wide-band and four-band modes provide transient shaping for different scenarios

Verdict

For
- Classic mode adds colour
- Powerful Natural & Smooth algorithms
- Mojo feature for further shaping
- Real-time waveform and tracer display
- Optional output clipper

Against
- No input gain
- No multiband option

DS-10 brings drum-specific transient shaping to your DAW, cleanly, simply and with excellent results

9/10