

Teenage Engineering PO 170 £399

This stylish monosynth looks the part but, as **Si Truss** discovers, look closer and there are significant issues

CONTACT WHO: Teenage Engineering **WEB:** <https://teenage.engineering> **KEY FEATURES**
Modular monosynth with four-track CV/MIDI sequencer



The mid-level offering in Teenage Engineering's new DIY range of modular Pocket Operators, the PO 170 is a self-

contained instrument that combines the PO 16 sequencer with five modules that form a fairly straightforward monosynth.

As with its siblings, the 170 comes flat-packed, requiring a basic, if slightly longwinded, self-assembly. The metal chassis itself is folded into shape and the module elements are slotted and screwed into place. In theory, even those with no electronics experience should be able to handle the build.

We did have a few issues that slowed us down, including a few fiddly elements that didn't seem to fit into place naturally and a certain amount of confusion caused by disjointed and at times unclear instructions. It's also worth being aware of the fact that the build uses proprietary screws and tools, and there are no spares in case any of these go missing while you're working. Despite taking a little longer than expected though, the whole process is ultimately satisfying, leaving a nice sense of achievement and ownership even before you turn the instrument on.

The resulting synth looks great with its eye-catching red faceplate and classic angled design. In terms of feel though, there's undeniably something 'DIY' about the PO 170; the patch points and controls, while not necessarily loose, have more give than you'd get with a pre-built synth, and the uncapped rotaries are a little fiddly and imprecise. We've also had issues with the Arp and Hold buttons on our 170's keyboard not working.

The lower element of the 170 is a straight copy of the PO 16 sequencer (reviewed over the page), and with its multiple tracks and preset saving it remains the most interesting element of the range. The remaining modules offer an LFO with two square and two triangle outputs, a square wave oscillator with PWM, a resonant low-pass filter, ADSR envelope, amp and speaker/output.

The elements themselves are decent-sounding but offer little that deviates from a basic monosynth setup. The highlight is the audio-rate LFO that can be patched to create gritty oscillator or filter modulation effects. There's fun to be had



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patching the sequencer's multiple tracks to the different modulation inputs too, but on the whole the 170 feels like it's flirting with, rather than fully committing to, its modular nature. A few additional patch inputs or a utility to combine/divide signals would be a good addition.

These elements would make a good introductory tool to form a more complex modular system though; a beginner-friendly way to convert the modules for Eurorack installation would certainly add appeal.

We really wanted to buy into TE's compact modular concept, but sadly the delivery isn't convincing. Teenage's own website describes the PO Modular range by saying "we have compromised on everything except sound quality", which sounds right, but then why aren't these compromises reflected in price? As a sub-£200 DIY project, the

PO 170 could be charming – although unclear instructions and unreliable components remain troubling – but, at £400, there's no getting around the fact that there are numerous better value and considerably more interesting options out there. **FM**

FM VERDICT

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The modular concept here is intriguing, but it's sadly let down by patchy execution and a price that feels tough to justify

THE PROS & CONS



Looks great

Synth elements sound good

The PO 16 sequencer is a powerful tool



Some components fit together poorly and have been unreliable in our tests

Synth elements are fairly basic

It's hard to justify that £400 price for a DIY kit