

DIGITECH GSP1101 £499
EFFECTS



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Arrgh! The rack is back. We slip into our Spandex and prepare to twiddle **by Adrian Clark**

We don't see so many rack effects units these days, possibly because of the dual popularity of retro-styled stompboxes and all-in-one bedroom practice units. There's also the small matter of a slight image problem with fridge-sized enormo-racks: Spandex, anyone? However, the rack effects unit still has its place, even in more modest rigs, especially if you need the flexibility of a multi-effects unit, but without the phrase-trainers, drum machines and assorted other extras that come with pedalboard units.

These days, you probably associate DigiTech with its GNX and RP ranges of pedalboard multi-effects units, and the company has certainly been pushing the boundaries with that format over the past few years. Back in the eighties and nineties, though, it was possibly better known for rackmount processors, hugely popular with the fast-growing home recording community. The range reached a peak in 1994 with the hugely flexible valve-driven GSP2101, so it's nice to see the company returning to this format with the new GSP1101.

What's onboard?

Squeezed into a 1U housing, the GSP1101 looks sleek and less 'techie' than its predecessor. A lack of buttons and knobs can mean that functions have been hidden away in complex nested menus, but that isn't usually the case with DigiTech. Indeed, a row of familiar amp-style knobs on the right side of the control panel is a reassuring touch.

Also to be found on the right side of the panel is a button marked 'set-up wizard', which is where we decided to start. The 'wizard' is common practice in the world of computer operating systems, and it's great to see a music tech company taking inspiration from the home computing world. The set-up wizard asks you a few questions regarding how you intend to hook up the GSP1101, and this process can be repeated whenever you adjust your rig.

There's a decent range of possible connection options, all shown in the user manual. For direct recording, the GSP1101 has a wide range of amp and cabinet models, and if you select the direct output in the set-up wizard, these models will be engaged on all patches. Dual sets of stereo

outputs allow you to use either balanced (XLR, with ground lift) or unbalanced connections, and there are also stereo return outputs if you decide to use the unit in the effects loop of an amp.

In keeping with the more 'pro' stylings of the GSP range, there are a few more connections. The USB socket can be used either for communicating with the X-Edit patch editing software or for direct computer recording. The X-Edit software and drivers are included on a CD. There's MIDI control for receiving and transmitting program and control changes and jack sockets for optional use of a footswitch and an expression pedal. Finally, there's a tantalising RJ45 port, described as 'reserved for future use', so we'll have to wait and see. Note that this isn't a standard Ethernet port, so don't try plugging the GSP1101 into your broadband router!

The GSP1101 comes with 99 factory-preset patches, along with space for another 99 user creations. Unless you're using one of the DigiTech footswitches, patches are selected linearly by means of the large edit/select knob; you can choose whether to

The Rivals

Things haven't changed much in the rackmount world for a few years, so **TC Electronic's G-Major** (£459) is still popular for players who only require effects. The **Line 6 PODxt Pro** (£449) represents the cream of the Line 6 modelling technology — ideal for players who want everything from the one box. The most recent unit here is the **Boss GT Pro** (£445). It's a fierce competitor with similar (and, in a couple of cases, better) specs and a more comprehensive front panel. All of these units have extremely high standards, so it'll boil down to personal taste... especially with the amp models.

have patches load immediately or when you press the edit/select knob. Several details about the current patch are shown on the unit's dual display. The two-digit LED display shows the patch number, while its name is shown in large type at the top of the LCD screen. Under the patch name, the amp and cabinet model and active effects modules are shown.

There are two ways of editing patches. The usual method is to work through all the parameters, but for a quicker, 'broad brushstroke' approach, the tone library and effect library pushbuttons make for a handy alternative. These libraries, introduced on the most recent RP



units, contain generous selections (40 each) of pre-programmed amp/distortion combinations and effect chains.

Speaking of the amp models and effects, there are plenty to choose from. The amp, cabinet and effect models are similar to those found on the larger GNX units, although the GSP1101 fares slightly better in the distortion stakes, with 17 effects, all modelled on famous fuzz, overdrive and distortion pedals. There's a decent range of effects, perhaps not in the BOSS GT Pro range, but enough for most people nonetheless. There's a particularly good range of modulation and filter options, including DigiTech's own SynthTalk and Whammy effects. Up to eight parameters can be controlled externally, either by MIDI, the internal LFOs or expression pedals.

The GSP1101 includes a feature called seamless time, whereby delay and reverb effects can be set to continue to their natural conclusion even after the patch has been changed. Seamless time can be adjusted individually for each patch and has two adjustable parameters, controlling the speed at which the previous patch's output fades away and the time before it starts to fade. This sort of thing is great for abrupt onstage

patch changes, resulting in a much more professional sound (and, let's be honest, covering up any mistakes you make when you switch to a new riff!).

Sounds

Our most recent sonic reference points are the GNX3000 and RP350, and we instantly recognised the same general character to a lot of the sounds in the GSP1101. With two of DigiTech's cutting edge AudioDNA2 processors onboard, the GSP1101 is DigiTech's most powerful product. These processors were previously only used singly in the latest RP units and offer twice the processing power of the GNX3000's four AudioDNA chips. You can tell... the sound is rich and crisp, with lots of detail.

As with all of DigiTech's most recent products, the amp and cabinet models are of a very high standard. We're particularly fond of the various Fender models and the Vox AC15, all of which feel very responsive to minute adjustments in picking force, pickup selection and so on.

Of course, if you already have the amp sound you want, you can use the GSP1101 as a standard rack effects unit. There are several possibilities here, and the simplest

is to run the unit in series between your guitar and amp, although you won't get the best out of the luscious delays and reverbs that way. Another connection option involves combining the GSP1101's amp and stompbox models with your amp's own tones. This worked well for us, but bear in mind that you'll need a clean sound on your amp if you want to avoid masking the subtleties of the GSP's overdrive tones.

Verdict

It's nice to see DigiTech return to the rack effects world. Although the current trend is for retro-style stompboxes, there's still a place for the rack unit in live or studio rigs. In particular, the rack format now benefits from 10 incredibly productive years of digital modelling progress, so the concept of the rack preamp/FX unit has changed a lot.

The price of the GSP1101 puts it in the semi-pro or pro range, but it's not excessively high. It could easily provide all the amp and effects sounds you'll need, and is therefore good value. Compared with the high-end GNX units, you lose out on the lack of built-in foot control, but you gain in other ways. Could this be the start of the rack revival? Er... ☹



Not so cryptic: that's a Marshall, then

DigiTech GSP1101

- PRICE:** £449
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Rack multi-effects processor with digital modelling
FEATURES: Wide range of amp and effects models, powered by DigiTech's new AudioDNA2 processors
EFFECTS: Over 120 amp, cabinet and effects models, plus 40 preset tone and effect libraries
PATCHES: 99 presets, 99 user slots
MIDI: Receives and transmits program and control changes
DISPLAY: Two-digit LED for patch numbers, LCD screen for other information.
CONNECTIONS: Input, left/right XLR outputs (with ground lift), left/right line outputs, left/right loop returns (with -10dBV/+4dBu selector), loop send, MIDI in/thru, footswitch jack, expression pedal jack, USB port, headphone output, RJ45 configuration port (reserved for future use).
POWER: IEC lead supplied
EXT CONTROLLERS: The DigiTech FS300 or GNXFC (not included) can be used with the GSP1101
OPTIONS: None
Sound Technology 01462 480000
www.digitech.com

Test results

Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



The edit/select knob allows you to scroll through the many available patches

The bottom line

- We liked:** Rack sophistication with the maximum ease of use
We disliked: Only a minor flaw, but the control knobs could do with deeper grips
Guitarist says: Very powerful preamp/multi-FX that revisits the racks of yore but with the benefits of modern generation digital modelling. The retro backlash starts here...