DAVE MARTIN samples the versatile JD7 distribution box/re-amper from Canada's Radial Engineering.

Radial Engineering JD7

DISTRIBUTION AND ROUTING SYSTEM

The Radial Engineering JD7 is a guitar signal distribution and routing system which allows one signal to be sent to as many as seven different devices, individually or in any combination. In addition, the JD7 has a balanced XLR output that allows the original performance to be recorded separately. Once this performance has been recorded, it can be routed back through the JD7 to the amplifiers or other devices attached to the unit for re-recording.

Features

The front-panel input section has two (selectable) inputs, one of which includes an 8dB pad that can be used for extremely high level inputs such as keyboards, active basses or acoustic guitar pre-amps. The input section also has a recessed control labeled "Drag," which is really the most unique aspect of the JD7. When a guitar is connected to an amplifier, there's an interaction (called loading) between the amplifier and the guitar pickups based on the relative impedances of the instrument and amp. The transformers and other circuitry in the JD7 effectively prevent the guitar from being affected by the amp's input impedance. The Drag control is a circuit that allows the player to dial in the appropriate amount of resistance (by changing the input impedance of the JD7) to match the effect of the amplifier.

Output Configuration

The seven outputs are configured as follows: Channel 1 is a direct out, with no transformer in the circuit; Channels 2, 3 and 4 are transformer-isolated outputs and have an on/off switch, a ground lift switch and a polarity reverse switch; Channels 5 and 6 are the same as Channels 2-4, but with the addition of an effects loop for each channel. The effects loops are accessed through quarter-inch inputs on the rear of the JD7 and are at guitar levels rather than line levels. Buttons on the front panel activate the loop for each channel. Channel 7 is a direct out identical to Channel 1 except that it is always active, which makes it perfect for electronic tuners.

The rear panel also contains a transformer-isolated XLR output (with ground lift and phase reverse switches) that allows a direct signal to be routed to the recorder at the same time that it goes to the amps. In addition, there's a balanced XLR input (with a polarity reverse and an input level adjustment) to take the direct signal back out of the recorder and into your choice of amplifiers. This gives the engineer the opportunity to re-amp the clean guitar sound for added creativity during the recording and mixing process.

In Use

I first tried the re-amping function of the JD-7 with three different amps set up in my main tracking room (using two vintage Fenders and a newish modeling-type amp). I ran a balanced signal from an iZ Radar through a mic line to the JD7, which was placed next to the amps. For straight re-amping, where the JD7 is used to convert the line level signal from the recorder to a guitar amp, it worked very well, giving me exactly the sound I was looking for. On one track, I sent the guitar signal to two amps through the JD7, with very different tones coming from each amp. Panned hard left and hard right (with an ambient mic about 15 feet away to capture room sound), it fit the track perfectly. For me, the best approach to re-amping with the JD7 was to decide what sound I wanted, then dial it up on the amps, and then use the Radial box to route signals accordingly rather than setting up a pile of guitar amps, a stack of microphones and pre-amps and then using the JD7 as part of the decision-making process. Others may find a method that works better for them, since the JD7 is quite flexible in this regard.

I experimented with the Drag control using a couple of guitars: a Gibson 575 with Humbucking pickups and a DanElectro electric 12-string with single-coil lipstick pickups. In the fully clockwise position (least resistance), the guitars sounded fairly bright and edgy — in the counterclockwise setting, both guitars sounded quite a bit darker. Since the main function of the Drag control is to duplicate the effect of being plugged into an actual amplifier, I tried to match the sound of the directly-plugged guitars against the sound of the guitars going through the JD7 and out an isolated output into the same amps. I used a Fender Deluxe Reverb and a Fender 75 for the test. I found that the Gibson sounded the most natural when turned more toward the counterclockwise position, while a more clockwise (and brighter) setting suited the DanElectro. I could still hear a slight difference between using, and not using, the JD7, especially with clean sounds, but it was a minor difference — less difference than plugging in a bypassed effect.

Conclusion

The JD7 was designed to "enhance the creativity of guitarists and engineers during the recording process." With the tonal possibilities inherent in having multiple amplifiers available at the touch of a button in addition to the control offered by the Drag knob, it certainly does meet that design goal. If you've experienced the time consuming process of waiting around while the guitarist plugged into one amp after another trying to find the "perfect" sound, you'll know the value of a box like the JD7. And with a list price of $800, the JD7 is, while not cheap, not so expensive as to be cost prohibitive. If you need what it does, it's a bargain. ❑

INFORMATION

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