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Radial Workhorse

TESTED BY BUDDY SALEMAN

THE WORKHORSE IS RADIAL'S TAKE on the 500 series Lunch Box module rack. It's Marine-tough with an 8x2 summing mixer that accepts eight different modules—from preamps to direct boxes and more. The versatility is unbeatable. You can mix the output of the eight modules through the bus, or bring in eight channels from your DAW, and mix them together through the Workhorse. All of the module slots are equipped with XLR, TRS, and D-sub inputs and outputs, so there's practically no signal that can't be routed through the beast. In addition, a "feed" switch lets you send the signal from one module to the next without patching anything. Bravo!

For those desiring a bona fide pro-studio interface designed to impart warm and brawny analog sound to a digital recording medium, the Workhorse is definitely a winning option. But there are some things

the typical musician/engineer with a home studio should consider.

For one thing, you should fully understand that the Workhorse is a no-nonsense, complex, and professional piece of gear used by renowned engineers and producers to make commercial recordings. It is not dumbed down, technically or operationally, for home-studio applications. Configuring the unit for optimum performance can be daunting if you're not a pro studio tech. Happily, the manual is one of the best written and most informative I've ever seen.

What's more, as a pro-level, modular system, the Workhorse is hardly inexpensive by home-studio standards. The Workhorse itself will set you back $1,399. The cost of adding modules depends on what you're after. Here are some street prices for the Radial modules we'll look at a little later on: X-Amp re-amping module ($249), JVD-Pre

instrument preamp/DI ($449), PowerPre mic preamp ($499), EXTC guitar effects interface ($249), Komit compressor/limiter ($499), TankDriver reverb preamp ($249), and Shuttle insert loop module ($139). Radial kindly supplied us with all of the above modules for our tests, but if we had to write our own check for the Workhorse and these seven modules, the total cost would currently be about $3,732.

But what's great about the Workhorse—especially for guitar players who are serious about home recording—isn't just the typical Radial quality and innovation (although that's definitely a bonus), but the fact that the unit offers so many guitar-oriented applications. It's like the Workhorse was designed with 6-string madness in mind. Let's look deeper into the Radial modules to fully understand this concept. (For more info, click to **radialeng.com**.)

EXTC Guitar Effects Interface

Huh? It's a balanced interface for stompboxes and other guitar effects that allows users to merge groovy and heinously gritty guitar boxes with pro-audio recording media. Run a line-level signal from your DAW into the EXTC, and it will "unbalance" the signal and convert it to high-impedance—the perfect insert signal for effects pedals of all types.

How I Rocked It I've used guitar effects in my studio for as long as I can remember, but the process wasn't as easy—nor the results as robust and clean sounding—as when using the EXTC. Some of my experiments included adding a spiky modulation effect to a snare (in an attempt to simulate producer Tony Visconti's world-changing, harmonized snare sound on David Bowie's *Low*), routing a kick drum through a fuzz pedal, and (I stole this idea from the Radial website) running a vocal through a wah pedal. Controlling the wet/dry mix with the EXTC's Blend control adds even more sonic trickery, as you can ensure note attacks are clear, but have all manner of fuzz, flanged, tremoled weirdness warbling just below the source sound.

JDV-Pre Instrument Preamp/DI

Huh? A class-A instrument input preamp designed to work with various types of pickups—even the oft-troublesome piezo.

How I Rocked It I plugged in a piezo-loaded acoustic first, as some piezos tend to "quack" and compromise the organic beauty of an acoustic guitar. A little tweaking with the Filter and Load Adjust controls had that guitar sounding almost as natural as a miked acoustic. Quack Be Gone! Electric guitars with humbuckers, single-coils, and P-90s all sounded studly with nice round attacks. I even "dressed up" a cheap solidbody's sound with the JDV-Pre, and then used the Aux Out to route the processed signal to a small amp. The improvement in the guitar's tone through the amp was impressive.

Komit Compressor Limiter

Huh? A transparent compressor combined with an old-school "clipping" limiter that can get as gritty as you please.

How I Rocked It As a compressor, the Komit is fine. It does what it's supposed to do with zero artifacts. But I missed the vibey crunch of some vintage British compressors, so I started playing with the limiter and was much more inspired. I dialed in some of that Stones "Street Fighting Man" crunchy kerrang for some acoustic-guitar tracks, and gave a lead vocal a touch of that Otis Redding-style "mic breakup" sound.

PowerPre Microphone Preamplifer

Huh? A feature-packed mic pre with a very savvy, 3-position Vox switch for adding breath, punch, or transparency.

How I Rocked It All the mod cons are here, as on most good mic preamps, but the Vox feature really made it easy to capture very cool vocal sounds with minimal effort on the fly. Gotta love that. I also miked some guitar amps and fooled with the Vox switch to get more air into a tone (Breath) and a little more midrange attack (Punch). This is a very versatile tool.

Shuttle Insert Loop

Huh? I call it a patch bay. You'll call it an effects loop.

How I Rocked It This is an easy way to route tracks into the Workhorse for processing by other modules.

Tank Driver

Huh? An interface that lets you route signals to and from an amp's spring reverb tank.

How I Rocked It Many DAWs have spring reverb plug-ins, but it's not Dick Dale spring reverb unless you toss the digital simulation and go with the real thing. The Tank Drive actually improves on the rich ambience by offering Blend (wet/dry), Boom, and Shimmer controls. Cowabunga!

X-Amp Reamper

Huh? The X-Amp lets you send a dry direct guitar track or a miked-amp track into another amp to create a tone or to improve your existing one.

How I Rocked It Reamping is no big deal in the digital realm, but it can be a bit tricky in the analog world. The X-Amp makes everything easy, flawless, and super clean when routing recorded signals to actual amplifiers positioned in nice rooms and captured by good mics. Yum. The dual outputs even let me transform a boring mono guitar track into a layered and sexy wide-stereo sound through two different amps. ◗