Digitech S200

Matt Kain examines the latest addition to Digitech's Studio effects range.

In the Digitech family of 'Studio' multi-effects processors, there are four siblings. These range from the S100 and S200 through to the professional Quad 4 and 400. Scott Christie reviewed the S100 in Issue 3 of AudioTechnology, so let's put its bigger brother through its paces.

Much about the two units is very similar. The sexy electric blue facia is there and the dual DSP engine remains 'under the bonnet'. In fact, the preset patches seem much the same as well, and a quick examination of the specs reveals few differences. So what justifies the $300 difference in price? This comes down mainly to a few significant operational changes – mainly the backlit LCD and the internal power supply.

Like its little brother, the S200 has left and right inputs and outputs (via unbalanced 6.5mm rear-mounted jacks), with left input acting as the mono input. There are no

digital in/outs, but the move into the digital domain is handled by 20-bit AD converters at the rather exotic sampling frequency of 46.875kHz, meanwhile internal processing is 48-bit. A Midi socket and footswitch input allows you to step through the presets remotely. Power is provided by the familiar IEC 'jug' cord, but there is no power switch at all! In most cases this shouldn't cause too much of an inconvenience. Also on the back is the input level control – anyone rack mounting the S200 would, doubtless, rather see this mounted on the front panel.

Once in, the sound is processed by the dual DSP engines in one of five configurations, depending on the program used. All configurations include a noise gate and simple three-band EQ on the input, and then use the engines in different ways for stereo effects, parallel mono effects, serial effects, etc. The best reverbs are obtained by the first configuration, employing souped up reverb algorithms that manifest smoother tails, longer reverb time, and a more convincing spatial simulation.

Selecting a program is as simple as rotating the jog wheel and watching the large numbers and corresponding program names show up on the display. And, unlike the S100, when you get to 99 you can keep turning to start over at program number one. To the right of the display is a little chart which reminds you where each type of effect lives. As each program is selected, the screen gives a simple, but very useful, diagram of the signal path.

With a program selected, it's a snap to edit parameters using the buttons and jog wheel. The interface is very
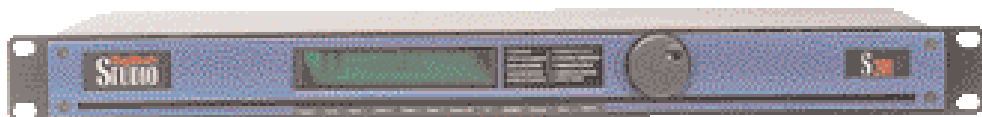
simple indeed, and all editing takes place on a single menu level. In fact, the deepest you'll ever need to go is three levels into the menus, that is if you need to dive into Utility mode for things like Midi channel and LCD contrast controls. And, no matter where you are, the Program button bails you out if you get lost. Adjusting program parameters is straightforward, especially for anyone who has used any multi-effects processor before, and changes are displayed both numerically and diagramatically. And, if you like your new parameters better than the preset, it's very easy to save it as one of 99 user programs.

So let's have a listen. No source sound ready? Fortunately Digitech provide a 'preview' function. The preview sound isn't particularly easy on the ears but it does at least allow you toggle through the presets without reaching for your keyboard, guitar, etc. A scroll through the presets offers plenty of good ideas and they seem to be very sensible starting points for a wide variety of effects.

The reverbs are very good, I've always found the Digitech algorithms to be very useable. There's also a good degree of variation among the reverb presets, so there's bound to be something that will fit the bill, whether it's vocals, drums, synth patches or anything else you wish to throw at it. The other effects like the delay, chorus and flanging are well handled, and the more 'out there' effects can be easily achieved with the ring modulator, vocoder and pitch shifter.

The S200 capably achieves what it sets out to do. It boasts significant improvements over the S100, and is easier to use as a result. There's a useful selection of presets on offer, the quality of effects is very good at this price, and the S200 really has the edge in user-friendliness. You may find subjectively better reverbs on other dedicated reverb units at around the $1000 to $1500 price point, but if you own a home studio and are looking for an outboard multi-effects unit that needs to be a jack of all trades, you'll find the S200 to be a great workhorse. Likewise if you're looking for a flexible second effects unit in your studio, the S200 will plug that gap very effectively. Another Digitech winner. **AT**