



Elektron

Octatrack

Now that computers can do it all, hardware sampling boxes are becoming a rare breed. **Liam O'Mullane** welcomes its return.

Octatrack DPS-1

Manufacturer **Elektron**

Price **€1,240 (€1,054 until 23 December)**

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Key Features

- 8 sampler tracks
- Drag-and-drop USB connectivity
- Live input processing
- Chainable track effects

Elektron manufactures a small but unique range of lovingly designed, hand-built hardware aimed at the fun side of music creation and interaction. The company's legendary product range includes the now highly sought-after Sidstation, which was based around a Commodore 64 sound chip (sadly, the Sidstation is discontinued due to the rarity of this particular chip). The current Elektron range consists of two drum machines and a synthesizer that are now joined by the Octatrack sampling box. These units have received quite a few accolades from electronic producers, so we're keen to see if the latest newcomer performs as strongly.

Out of the box

The solid metal casing and well-built pushbutton dials really make the Octatrack feel roadworthy. The dials and crossfader are rubber-coated, which not only gives them a nice feel, but also ensures a good grip in hot and sweaty gigging situations. The bottom row of buttons enable you to sequence the eight sampler tracks, and each one can be set to one of four operation modes: Flex, Static, Thru and Neighbor.

Flex mode is what we'd probably describe as the performance sampling mode. It enables you to undertake regular sampling tasks such as moving

around sample start times and working with slices. Static mode performs similar tasks, but it isn't intended for real-time editing as it streams from the Octatrack's PCMCIA card. Flex mode performances are loaded into the Octatrack's RAM; Static mode is better

Measuring Up

The Korg Electribe SX SD (£540) has onboard sampling but pales in comparison to the feature set and many effects of the Octatrack. Sample legends AKAI currently has the MPC2500SE (£950), which is in the same price range. This is, of course, quite a different beast, though, aimed more at production than real-time sampling and manipulation. Although both of these are powerful machines for sampling and subsequent manipulating, none of them offers the same range of effects and external audio processing.



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suited when you're working with long audio files such as general looping or backing tracks.

The other two modes are for processing sounds in real time. The first, called Thru, enables you to process external sounds with the Octatrack's onboard effects. The second, Neighbor, enables you to run one sampler track into another to get double the processing power at the cost of losing a sampler track. You can stack as many channels as you like using this technique.

Sample sources

Although the included 4GB PCMCIA card has a good range of samples pre-loaded, it's very easy to hook up the Octatrack to act as a USB device for both adding samples and backing up your projects. Once we'd got our samples into the device we tried a blind session with the unit, but found very quickly that a read of the manual is required to fully understand this device – with the large feature set comes a less than intuitive interface at first.

However, after a couple of hours' practice we managed to grasp the majority of functions, with enjoyable results. Examples included being able to trigger pitch changes mid-sample and assigning different parameter scenes to either side of the crossfader for entertaining live manipulation.

On the range

Each sampler track has two independent effects and you can create a master track processor at the cost of one of these sampler tracks (similar to when using Neighbor mode). We found that two per track is sufficient, though, as long as you're careful to select professional-sounding sample sources. On this note, we found that any loops we loaded in successfully synced to tempo without any user interaction, and although not perfect, the time-stretch algorithm is more than adequate and sounds particularly good when you can hear it being pushed.

Overall, the sound quality of the Octatrack is without fault and the onboard effects are equally good.

However, we feel that we only scratched the surface of what's possible with this device – it's something you'll keep coming back to year after year. The interface makes it a fun way to work and is a welcome change from screen-led solutions. And because the Octatrack can also trigger MIDI hardware, you could even use it as a composition hub when you're feeling creative but away from the computer. **MTM**

MTM Verdict

WHY BUY

- + Great fun to use
- + In-depth audio tweaking
- + Good effects
- + Built to last

WALK ON BY

- Steep learning curve

A complex, powerful device that will change the way you go about your live or studio work. Great sound quality, effects and programming features will keep you and the audience entertained.

