

Mackie's d.2: An out-of-the-box winner.



A Double Dose of Digital

By David Cross & Robert LaFrance

In this issue, we double our digital pleasure as Dave Cross makes nice with Mackie's d.2 mixer and Robert LaFrance dances with the Denon DN-S3500 CD/MP3 player.

Mackie d.2

Common sense dictates that you should never buy first-generation products. They're inconsistent, buggy, and usually feel incomplete. Anyone with the patience to wait for a manufacturer to come out with the "fixed" model (i.e.—version 2.0) is usually well-served by doing so.

There are exceptions to this rule, and the d.2 scratch mixer (\$599 MAP) by Woodville Wash.-based Mackie is a great example of one. Mackie, a company that had never built a DJ mixer before, has pulled off something spectacular here: they've done nearly everything right on the first try.

The d.2 is a two-channel pro-DJ mixer with an Infinium optical crossfader, full contour controls, and 3-band EQs with full kills. It's shaped similarly to other industry-leading scratch mixers, with a clutter-free mixing space, and a feature-packed EQ area. The mixer has a full array of inputs and outputs, including a switchable effects send/return, and many balanced connections. A major feature touted on the d.2 is the ability to purchase a FireWire add-on card (\$249 MAP) that turns the mixer into a four-in/two-out (two-stereo-in/one-stereo-out) audio interface. This allows you to pump two discrete stereo inputs directly into the mixer, while recording the output onto the computer.

First things first: the d.2's Infinium crossfader is the real deal. It's incredibly accurate, and the cut-in time can be adjusted to an infinitesimally small amount. In addition, the crossfader has a tension control that adjusts overall resistance.

You can have buttery-smooth fader travel, or breathe-on-it-and-it'll-move performance.

Metering is accomplished with an array of stylish blue and white LEDs. The tops of the EQ knobs light up, providing hassle-free indication of their settings in the dark. Other handy performance-oriented light-up functions include little red LEDs that tell you if a fader is reversed, blue LED switches for effects and the mic, and dedicated separate program, main and meter switches.

The d.2 is laid out and designed in a very intuitive manner. The EQs have adequate space around them for easy adjustments, and the cue monitor uses a full-sized fader cap for easy switching between sources. The transform switches feel great, and offer both toggle and spring-loaded momentary action. In short, the d.2 is an instrument first, and a mixer second.

FireWire functionality on the mixer is spot-on as well. Driver installation is a snap on PCs, and effortless on Macs. The d.2's audio connections worked flawlessly, allowing playback of the two stereo sources (activated on the mixer by selecting the FireWire input toggle) while recording the output. Absolutely no problems were encountered using popular DJ and production applications like Traktor, Live, and Mackie's own DAW, Traktion 2.0.

Traktion is part of a new breed of virtual studios that prioritize simplicity of use over complexity of features. This isn't to say that Traktion can't handle typical DAW tasks, as it contains a full feature set, but its main selling point is that you can boot it up and figure it out in a few minutes without reading a novel of a manual. Traktion presents all pertinent information on one screen, and everything from parameter manipulation to piano rolls to effects routing is laid out in an intuitive manner. Traktion 2.0 is bundled for free with the FireWire add-on.

Also, according to Mackie, MixVibes PRO 6 is now supported as part of the d.Series FireWire card bundle, making playback of digital media files just as simple. MixVibes PRO 6 supports up to 16 virtual players, with both VST and DirectX plug-in support, a powerful 16-pattern sampler and more.

The d.2 has quite a bit going for it, but there are a few very minor drawbacks. First of all, there is a bit of crosstalk going on, meaning I was able to hear a small amount of sound from my CD player when I was set to the phono input, and vice versa. This was only perceptible

when there was nothing playing on the selected input, and is easily alleviated by stopping playback on the offending source.

A slightly more frustrating problem concerned the headphone cue monitor. The cue slider, while very easy to use, doesn't provide much mixing flexibility. The silk-screened markers indicate that the left-right travel of the slider is going to offer a gradual mix between channels, much like an old-school crossfader. In reality, the slider behaves like a scratching crossfader, giving the ability to listen only to the individual channels and a 50/50 mix, with little to no option to cue a gradual blend.

But these are minor, mixing-oriented concerns for a product that is obviously marketed as a scratch instrument. Overall, the Mackie d.2 is an absolutely amazing product. For a first-time DJ mixer manufacturer to create such a high-quality, full-featured device at this price point is almost unbelievable. The d.2 is the real deal, a mixer worthy of the Mackie name, and a bold statement about their future dedication towards the DJ market.