

Mac PC What is it? Latest version of Mackie's intuitive DAW PRICE: £219

CONTACT: Loud Technologies, 01268 570 808 [WWW.mackie.com](http://www.mackie.com) INFO: Project Bundle, £93; Ultimate Upgrade, £179

LOOP BROWSER
The new integrated loop browser allows easy access to the bundled loops. You can also use it to browse your own loops

AUTOMATION CURVES
Featuring Bezier curves and multiple nodes for smooth parameter automation

FOLDER TRACK
These let you group tracks together as you see fit, greatly aiding organisation

FILTER COLUMN
Drag from the New Filter icon and drop straight onto the end of a track – or an individual clip – to insert an effect or instrument

ON-SCREEN EDITING
All audio and MIDI editing is completed in the main project view. Tracks can be expanded or compressed with a mouse click

CONTEXT-SENSITIVE WINDOW
This area changes to display options for any selected element. It might seem complex, but it works very well

CPU METER
Traktion 3 has much-improved CPU efficiency over previous versions – you can verify that here

MASTER VOLUME AND FILTER
Drop filters here to strap them across the entire mix, as well as tweaking the levels and panning

MACKIE Traktion 3



Mackie are back with Traktion 3, but can they add any useful new features without detracting from its streamlined ethos? Let's get these wheels in motion and find out...

► **SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS**

PC: 1GHz CPU, 512MB RAM, 10GB disk space, Windows XP, DVD drive
Mac: G4/G5/Intel 1GHz, 512MB RAM, 10GB disk space, OS X 10.4.8, DVD drive

► **TEST MACHINE**

PC: Rock Centrino 2.1GHz, 1GB RAM, Windows XP Home, Novation X-Station
Mac: Powerbook 1.8GHz, 1GB RAM, OS X 10.4.8, Novation X-Station

Hunting through endless drop-down menus, pop-up windows and minute, obscurely labelled icons might be a good indication that your software is packed with features, but for some, this is more of a confusing distraction than a bonus. Those who have found Traktion to be their preferred DAW – or 'Traktionees' as they have wryly monickered themselves – have been enjoying an idyllic life of single screen-based composition since version 1 (**cm**57, 6/10). By the time Traktion 2 came out, the DAW had been snapped up by Mackie, who allowed the program to flourish

naturally, rather than overloading it with 'hot features' and the like, and we gave it a stonking 10/10 in **cm**85.

With version 3, Mackie are offering many workflow enhancements aimed at squashing some of the criticisms raised last time around, as well as improved control surface support and some audio engine improvements, much of which we covered in **cm**113's *CM Guide to Traktion 3*.

Right on Traktion

For those who are unfamiliar with it, Traktion takes a one-window approach to MIDI sequencing and audio recording in order to keep things simple. Each track can contain

MIDI or audio information, and all data on a track is edited directly in the project window – the track's lane expands to show the audio or MIDI editor and the relevant editing tools.

Traktion then applies a modular system of what it calls 'Filters' to each track. A Filter is simply any type of plug-in, be it a volume fader, an output meter or a VST effect or instrument. Filters can be quickly added, rearranged, muted or deleted at the click of a button. It's a very logical and straightforward system, but this is also its limitation: in early versions of Traktion, it simply wasn't possible to set up a send effect, for example. However, this has

been overcome with 'Rack Filters', a modular processing system built in a similar vein to that of EnergyXT.

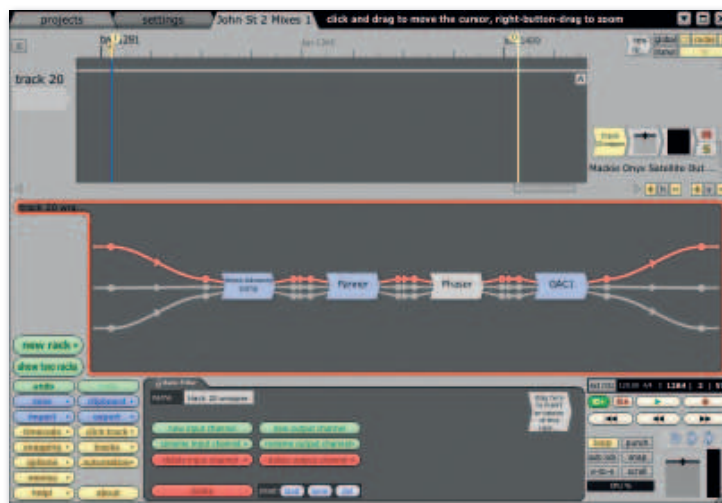
Rack filters enable some of the functions of the more traditional sequencers – such as the good old send effect – and have much more advanced functionality for anyone willing to get stuck in. Throw two single-oscillator VST synths into a rack filter, add a couple of volume Filters and a resonant filter plug-in and you're effectively building a modular synth, for example.

So what's new for version 3? Firstly and, to us, most significantly, we can now make use of Folder tracks. In previous iterations, a complex project would often entail endless mouse-scrolling down, down and further down to reach your last track. Now, sets of tracks can be grouped, compressed, split and rearranged from within Folder tracks, with Filters and volume applied to all. This simple

improves on the previous straight-line method of automating VST instruments and effects, and makes gradual tempo changes in conjunction with the EE algorithm a joy to implement.

Tracktion now also intelligently caters for parameter automation. Switch-based parameters on VST effects and instruments operate correctly when automating stepped curves, and VSTXML support has been added, meaning that VST automation parameters are grouped and named sensibly, without the need to trawl through massive, tedious lists of parameters on screen. In short, Tracktion's automation system has been tightened up significantly, putting it easily on a par with the competition in this area.

Other tweaks include loop browsing, tidying up of the Tracktion Edit folder for each project, a resizable context window, Bypass



effects Mackie have put together (see *Ultimate or Project?*, below) make it a more than viable starter system for new users.

Undoubtedly, some will bemoan the pastel colour scheme, which gives the misleading impression that Tracktion is something of a toy, and – here's the crunch – the total lack of a conventional mixer. We've said this before, though: if you moan about the lack of a mixer, you've really missed the point of Tracktion.

Our only real complaint concerns working with large multitrack projects where scrolling and editing can be graphically clunky, with response times leaving something to be desired. Overall though, Tracktion 3 is as beautifully elegant as ever. It's still hugely intuitive, and its new features make it more powerful and easier to stay organised with than ever. This is one deeply powerful DAW that never gets in the way of that all-important creative flow. **cm**

▲ It's now easy to wrap multiple Filters in a Rack

“OVERALL, TRACKTION 3 IS AS BEAUTIFULLY ELEGANT AS EVER”

but beautifully executed feature is, to our minds, worth the upgrade alone.

Elastique fantastic

On top of this, Mackie have implemented the excellent Elastique Efficient timestretch/pitchshift algorithm, making audio timestretching, root shifting and formant manipulation more precise and laden with fewer artifacts.

The introduction of Bezier-curved automation tracks significantly

Filters and Render Marked Region options, preset selections in the Filter menu, new Marker tracks, safe record and more – all of which add to the experience, without compromising the inherent useability of the program.

Sub-Tracktion?

So is it worth the upgrade? Absolutely: Folder tracks and the updated audio timestretch algorithm make it a no-brainer for T2 users. Meanwhile, the package of instruments and

▶ ALTERNATIVELY

Steinberg Cubase SE3

N/A » N/A » £110

Budget-priced music production system based on Cubase SX3

Cakewalk Sonar Home Studio 6 XL

cm113 » 9/10 » £130

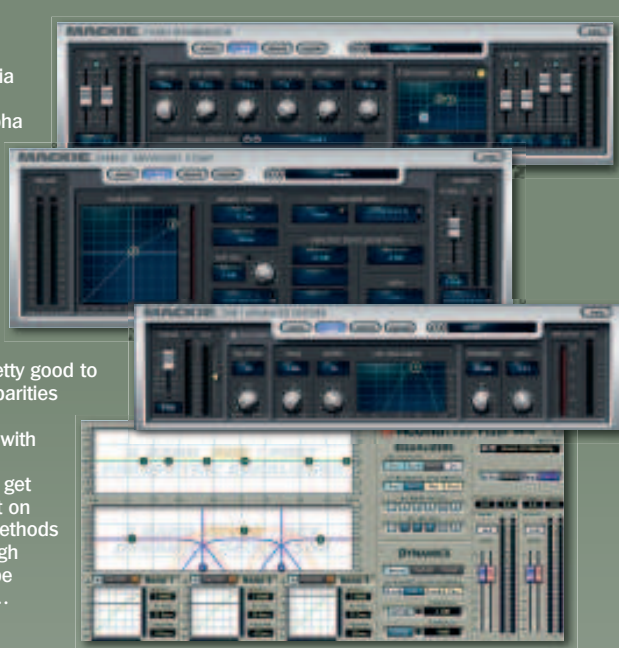
Cakewalk's middleweight version of their full-on DAW, and at a keener price too

Ultimate or Project?

Tracktion 3's Ultimate bundle features IK Multimedia Samplertank and Amplitube LE, Submersible Music DrumCore, Garrigan Personal Orchestra, Linplug Alpha 3, CronoX 3 and RMIV, while the Project bundle offers many of the same instruments but with much-reduced 'lite' soundsets. Also included is the silky-sounding Mackie Mixing and Mastering Tools, including a Panner, Stereo and Mono Compressors, a smooth Reverb, Stereo and Mono six-band EQ, and the Mix Finaliser. There's also a host of loops from Sonic Reality (Ultimate offers 2000 Apple loops, 200 REX files and 1GB of multitrack loops, while Project has 500 Apple, 50 REX and 250MB of others). The loops vary from pretty good to awful, with some shocking volume and texture disparities in places often making comping a chore.

The installer also includes SWA tutorial videos, with *Quick Start* in Project and *Mastering Tracktion 3* in Ultimate. Beware the initial mind-numbing effort to get all the instruments authorised, though. If you aren't on the net, it's a real pain, although there are other methods offered, such as using another PC and going through a laborious email procedure. If only all this could be bundled up into Tracktion's authorisation process...

▶ Tracktion 3 offers plenty of bundled plug-ins



VERDICT

FOR
+ An elegant, easy-to-use MIDI/audio workstation
+ Folder tracks
+ Excellent pitchshift/timestretch algorithm

AGAINST
– Toy-box styling
– Graphics can grind with large projects
– Laborious plug-in authorisation process
– Variable quality of supplied loops

Although it's not as much of a leap as version 2 was, Tracktion 3 is still highly impressive, and crucially, the new features don't compromise the software's legendary usability at all

RATING

