

Native Instruments Guitar Rig £349

A complete guitar amp and effects sound system for the computer by Trev Curwen

NATIVE INSTRUMENTS GUITAR RIG

PRICE: £349

TYPE: A complete amp and effects rig in software with interface/foot controller

PLUG-IN FORMATS SUPPORTED: RTAS, Audio Units, VST, DXI
COMPUTER SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:

PowerMac G4 or above running Mac OSX, Pentium III 700MHz or Athlon XP 1.33 GHz PC running Windows XP. Stereo soundcard with fast ASIO or Core Audio drivers

CONNECTIONS (RIG KONTROL): 6.4mm jack guitar input x 2, 6.4mm jack left and right line outputs

AMPS: Gratiifier, Twang Reverb, Plexi, AC Box

EFFECTS: Skreamer, Distortion, Tremolo, Stoned Phaser, Chorus+Flanger, Ensemble, Rotator, Octaver, Wahwah, Talkwah, Graphic EQ, Parametric EQ, Shelving EQ, Treble Booster, Volume Pedal, Limiter, Compressor, Noisegate, Quad Delay, Spring Reverb, Studio Reverb, Psychedelay, Pitch Pedal

AUTOMATION: Automated control of parameters within a sequencer

DIMENSIONS (RIG KONTROL): 310 (w) x 210 (h) x 50 (d) mm

WEIGHT (RIG KONTROL)(kg/lb): 1.85/4.1

POWER REQUIREMENTS (RIG KONTROL): 9V PP3 battery or AC adaptor
OPTIONS: AC adaptor

Arbiter
020 8202 1199
www.native-instruments.com
www.arbitermt.co.uk

The rivals

IK Multimedia Amplitube Live £79
Line 6 GuitarPort 2 £110
IK Multimedia Amplitube £279

GuitarPort 2 comes with a USB audio interface for plugging a guitar straight in and has great tuition facilities. Amplitube has been the most versatile amp/ speaker/effects plug-in available, but will not run in stand-alone mode. Amplitube Live features a cut down set of sounds but is stand-alone software for playing and practicing rather than recording. Mac OSX only.



★★★★★
Guitarist
CHOICE

Native Instruments may be a new name to most guitarists but the German company has built a name in high-tech circles as a purveyor of quality virtual instruments for use with software recording systems. This new venture channels that modelling expertise into the guitar arena with the Guitar Rig, which aims to create realistic software modelling for amp, speaker and effects simulation. Guitar Rig also sets itself apart from the immediate competition by including a hardware component in the form of a foot controller that not only switches and controls effects but also acts as a preamp to convert the Hi-Z guitar signal to line level for direct input to a computer soundcard.

Also unusual is that Guitar Rig is designed both for stand-alone use in its own right for practice (or even gigging if you're brave enough) and for use as a plug-in in a software recording package, where it can be used when recording guitar directly or work as an effect on previously recorded tracks – guitar or otherwise.

Software

The basic tenet of Guitar Rig is to provide all the sound shaping tools that

a guitarist will need in the form of a modular system where the modules can be slotted into a virtual rack in any number and connected in any order.

Overall there are four amps, 14 cabinets (with five microphone choices) and more than 20 different effects that can be used. These are grouped into amp, distortion, modulation, filter, volume and 'other' module categories that are located in groups on the left hand side of the page to be simply dragged and dropped into the virtual rack on the right. A 'split' module can be inserted into the rack to set up parallel signal paths if desired.

The four amp models are based on a MESA Dual Rectifier, a blackface Fender Twin, a Marshall 'Plexi' 50 and a Vox AC30. Distortion is provided by Tube Screamer and BOSS DS-1 models while modulation effects are based on a Voodoo Labs Tremolo, Electro-Harmonix Small Stone Phaser, Leslie 147 rotary speaker, TC Electronic Chorus and Flanger and two from BOSS: an OC-1 Octaver and the original CE-1 Chorus Ensemble.

Graphic, parametric and shelving EQ are all available as separate modules alongside treble booster, wah-wah pedal, talk wah, volume pedal, limiter,

NI GUITAR RIG	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Performance	★★★★★

■ **WE LIKED** Hugely versatile; foot control is a very practical asset

■ **WE DISLIKED** Needs a powerful PC/Mac and fast soundcard for best results

noise-gate and compressor modules, and for ambience you get a quad delay, spring reverb, studio reverb, reverse delay and a pitch pedal based on the DigiTech Whammy.

Each individual module has a fully adjustable set of parameters but also comes with a set of parameter presets to instantly select a sound. And if you don't want to build a rack from scratch there are 260 presets, presented in easy to understand banks, that provide a full rack ready for use. Being hard-drive based there is no limit to the amount of new banks and presets you can create and save.

When it comes to choosing a speaker cab there are many options covering all the standard sizes and configurations and actually modelled on existing Fender, Marshall, Vox, Orange, Matchless, MESA/Boogie and Dr Z



Guitar Rig is a major breakthrough in that it makes the marriage of computer and guitar more accessible than it's ever been





Building your own rack has never been easier than with NI's comprehensive and simple to use Guitar Rig software

→ cabs. One of five virtual microphones can be used on the cab with several positions plus other adjustable parameters being available. The most surprising thing, though, is that you can use up to eight different cabinets at the same time to create a virtual room full of speakers when recording.

An extra nice software touch, as well as the provision of a tuner and metronome, is a tape deck facility that provides a pair of synchronised virtual tape decks. With these you can record your playing to the hard drive as a wav file or record a passage and loop it for playing along with. As the tape decks can play back and loop audio files you can load in a drum loop for playing along to (several come bundled with the software) or you can load in a difficult solo that you are trying to learn and play it back at half speed like a basic phrase trainer.

Hardware

The hardware section of Guitar Rig is a solidly built metal pedal board known as Rig Kontrol and powered by an AC adaptor or a 9V battery. There are two guitar inputs, each with a gain control and left and right jack outputs to connect to a soundcard. Footswitching facilities can only be used with a single guitar as the control information is sent as one channel of the audio signal and translated by the software.

There are four switches and a pedal treadle and each of these can be easily assigned to a different function for each preset. Generally, the switches can be used to move between presets or to turn various rack components on and off while the treadle can be assigned to parameter adjustment – wah or volume change, for example, or even to crossfade between the two paths of a parallel signal chain.

IN USE: The best way to get the measure of the Guitar Rig is by trying out the presets for some instant

gratification. These are categorised by musical genre, popular guitarist's signature sounds (thinly disguised names abound), specific tracks etc. It's plain to see that the programmers have been working overtime to create something for all tastes from huge reverberated Dick Dale surf twang through all manner of rock, blues and pop sounds to full-on metal and sounds from contemporary bands like Blink-182. The Rig Kontrol foot unit works well in providing such things as switching the distortion pedals on and playing real time wah, but its compact

size makes access to the middle set of switches slightly awkward for larger foot sizes and there is a slight time lag when switching between presets as the computer loads the data.

The sound quality of the effects is excellent and to these ears the amps offer faithful recreations of the real thing's sonic signature although, as with all amp simulations, everyone will have their own view as to how accurate the emulation is. It is fair to say, though, that there are some great tones on tap here. With the Marshall, Fender, Vox and Rectifier models you are starting out with the right mix of amps to cover a massive percentage of the amp tones heard on record and with the promise of new amp models and effects boxes to be added in future downloadable updates the sound palette can only get wider still.

The real fun, of course, starts when you come to tweak the presets or construct your own 'rig' from scratch. With the number of modules on offer, the various routing possibilities and the huge depth of parameter adjustment, the sky's the limit for sonic tinkering. Should you wish to use it there is incredible attention to detail available for tailoring the sound – each amp, as well as all the front panel controls, has rear panel and 'expert' adjustments that can do things like changing the voltage supply and adjusting the valves' bias. Overall, Guitar Rig lets you dial up just about any amp/effects/speaker sound that you can think of.

Verdict

There are a handful of excellent software amp simulation packages available (check out issue 249's round-up), but each has a fairly specific role and could not really be said to be all-encompassing. With this in mind, Native Instruments has been very astute with Guitar Rig. Coming into the guitar market late, NI have been able to take an overview of all the competition



and package the major elements found in several other programs together into a product that can fulfil all of the different amp simulation software roles. Guitar Rig can work on Mac or PC as a conventional plug-in or as a stand-alone item and has usefully integrated practice facilities so, in terms of versatility, it eclipses all the other software amp simulations even before the foot control comes into play.

Guitar Rig is a major breakthrough in that it makes the marriage of computer and guitar more accessible than ever by combining just the right mix of easy to use but extremely versatile software with practical physical control. **G**

Native Instruments Guitar Rig
Guitarist RATING ★★★★★