

Roland Octapad SPD-30 | £629

Will Roland's next-level pad controller make you want to hit it with your rhythm stick? **Chris Barker** flops out his stick bag in anticipation...



WHAT IS IT?

An electronic drum and percussion tool, with external triggers, looping and MIDI over USB

CONTACT

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HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 Fantastic pads with no crosstalk
- 2 Mostly great, usable sounds with brilliant looping options
- 3 Massively expandable using extra pads sequencer

Following the recent tradition of the current output of Roland, they're again looking to their prestigious past for a

product and rejuvenating it for today's market. Now it's time to find out if the bells and whistles on the new 2010 Octapad really make it a must-have performance and studio tool.

Beat designer

The look hasn't changed much since it's first airing in '89 but it's been given a more modern feel and is super robust with thick rubber pads ready for a bashing. Around the back there's a heap of connection options, with MIDI over USB, regular MIDI I/O and USB memory stick input. There are also external trigger inputs for ride, snare, hi-hat input, kick and a separate hi-hat

control and footswitch, enabling you to expand the SPD-30 into a compact electronic drum kit.

The first disappointment comes in the lack of sounds. At this price I was really hoping for more than 50 kits to

choose from. That said, there are plenty of fantastic offerings here, with only a few bizarre preset choices such as TechnoWahScape, proving again that Roland can still err on 'flashy' rather than 'useful'.

Picking up some sticks and getting busy with the SPD is a real pleasure. It's so utterly playable and no matter how hard you begin hitting it, it never gave any crosstalk between pads or felt like it was going to suffer any damage.

Editing kits

Digging deep into the machine was simple, but it did mean taking a trip to the manual. The interface itself only makes sense after a good read so it's by no means, naturally intuitive. You have to hold down keys, or press multiple keys at once to attain different operations. Once in the editing mode, you simply hit a pad to select it and use two rotary encoders to change the tuning, muffling, tone colour, pitch

Expanding the SPD-30

Adding extra pedals, footswitches and triggers turns the SPD-30 into an extremely powerful electronic percussion instrument, plus it makes it much more comfortable to play complicated kick drums and hi-hat patterns when you add pedals. Each of the five

rear trigger inputs are dual layer enabling assignment of sounds to the skin and rim of a trigger for example. Even though the trigger inputs are labelled kick, snare etc, there's no reason why two kick drum pedals couldn't be connected in the kick and snare inputs.

There's heaps of tweakability with the external pads and their sensitivity, so you can avoid accidental re-triggering. There's also plenty of custom settings for adding hi-hat pedals, with support for the V-Drum VH-11 or FD-8 hi-hat standards.





sweep and so on of each sound. You can also dive in and change the ambience on each sound, changing the amount of reverb and reverb type on each pad. Similarly, you can edit the effects comprehensively. You can apply different parameters to each effect, set the send levels for each pad individually and really customise kits, saving them to your liking.

For performance purposes, there's a nifty kit chain feature that allows you to line up your favourite kits in banks A-H, with 20 kits in each bank. If you add a footswitch, you can then cycle through these chains with a tap of your

didn't include a footswitch in the box, especially at this price point.

Beat builder

Where the Roland SPD-30 really comes into it's own is as a live looper and beat maker. This function is not only brilliant fun, but after getting your head around the clunky interface it's very quick and reliable.

Three different kits can be layered and overdubbed, with optional real-time quantisation making your beats locked tight when recording. You can then hold the mute button and mute pads over the three layers by

compatible V-Link devices, so if you're looking for a flexible, expandable drum and percussion instrument then hats off to Roland because these bases are very well covered.

Price promise

Overall this is a robust, expandable performance tool and would sit happily in live electronic performance setup or to add clever electronic elements to acoustic kits. That said it's too expensive to recommend to non-drumming producers when you consider what you could do with a £150 MIDI controller and decent drum plug-in software.

One thing I did notice after the SPD left my studio, was how much I missed it for creating interesting rhythms beyond

what I would do when programming or bashing keys on a MIDI keyboard controller. Even if it's just for percussion overlays in your DAW the SPD-30 provides instant top quality sounds and a sturdy surface to bash out percussive top lines 'til your track's content. If they were to knock £200 off the RRP, Roland would have a mass-market winner on their hands.

Roland have priced themselves out of being competitive in a wider market and the SPD-30 sits definitely as a professional performance tool that's great for making music, but never quite crucial. **FM**

Even if it's just for percussion overlays in your DAW the SPD-30 provides instant top quality sounds

foot. Great for live performance and to quickly change kits between tracks. In fact, with a footswitch it's possible to cycle through an array of options on the SPD, including loop points and more. It's a real shame that Roland

tapping individual pads on and off during the loop. Plus you can enter the part level menu while your multi-tracked loop is playing and adjust the level of each of the three layers individually. Parts can be saved to memory and easily exported onto USB key for recall later.

The whole experience of looping, muting, triggering and layering drum sounds and effects is brilliant fun and works without any problems. You will need to get a footswitch to make the most of this though, and be able to quickly start and stop loops without putting the sticks down.

MIDI over USB provides easy connection to our DAW and the unit is great for getting a bit more hands on with software such as Guru or Battery. That said, there are cheaper options for doing that, if that's all you're after.

There's a vast amount of customisability here with the option to apply different sensitivity and volume curves on each pad and tweak the SPD until it's completely right for your style of playing. This is also possible for any external pads that are connected, plus you can use the V-Link technology to use the pad to trigger visuals with

SPECS

- Pads:** Eight
- Instruments:** 670
- Kits:** 50
- Kit Chain:** Eight chains (20 steps per chain)
- Instrument Parameters:** Tuning, Muffling, Soft Attack, Tone Color, Pitch Sweep, Volume, Pan, ReverseEffect
- Types:** Ambience (7 Types), Equalizer, Limiter, Multi Effect (30 Types)
- Resolution:** 480 ticks per quarter note, **Recording Method:** Real-time, Maximum **Note Storage:** approx. 10,000 Notes
- Display:** 160 x 160 dots Graphic Type LCD Pad Status Illumination x 8
- Connectors:** PHONES Jack (Stereo 1/4 inch phone type), OUTPUT Jacks (L (MONO), R) (1/4 inch phone type), MIX IN Jack (Stereo 1/4 inch phone type), EXTERNAL TRIGGER INPUT Jacks x 4, HH CTRL Jack, FOOT SW Jack (1/4 inch TRS phone type), MIDI Connectors (IN, OUT), USB MEMORY Connector (for USB Memory), USB MIDI Connector (for USB MIDI)
- Output Impedance:** 1.0kOhms
- Dimensions:** 541 x 272 x 88mm
- Weight:** 3.8kg

ALTERNATIVES



Alesis Performance Pad
£179

The sounds are nowhere near as good as the Roland's and it doesn't have the same feature set. But if you just want something to whack, it's brilliant value.

alesis.com



Yamaha DTX Multi-12
£685

Even more expensive than the Roland, but sporting a more playable design and 12 pad points instead of eight. yamaha.com

FutureMusic VERDICT

BUILD	■■■■■■■■■
VALUE	■■■■■■■■■
EASE OF USE	■■■■■■■■■
VERSATILITY	■■■■■■■■■
RESULTS	■■■■■■■■■

Robust, with tons of features, but expensive for producers due to its drummer-specific features.

