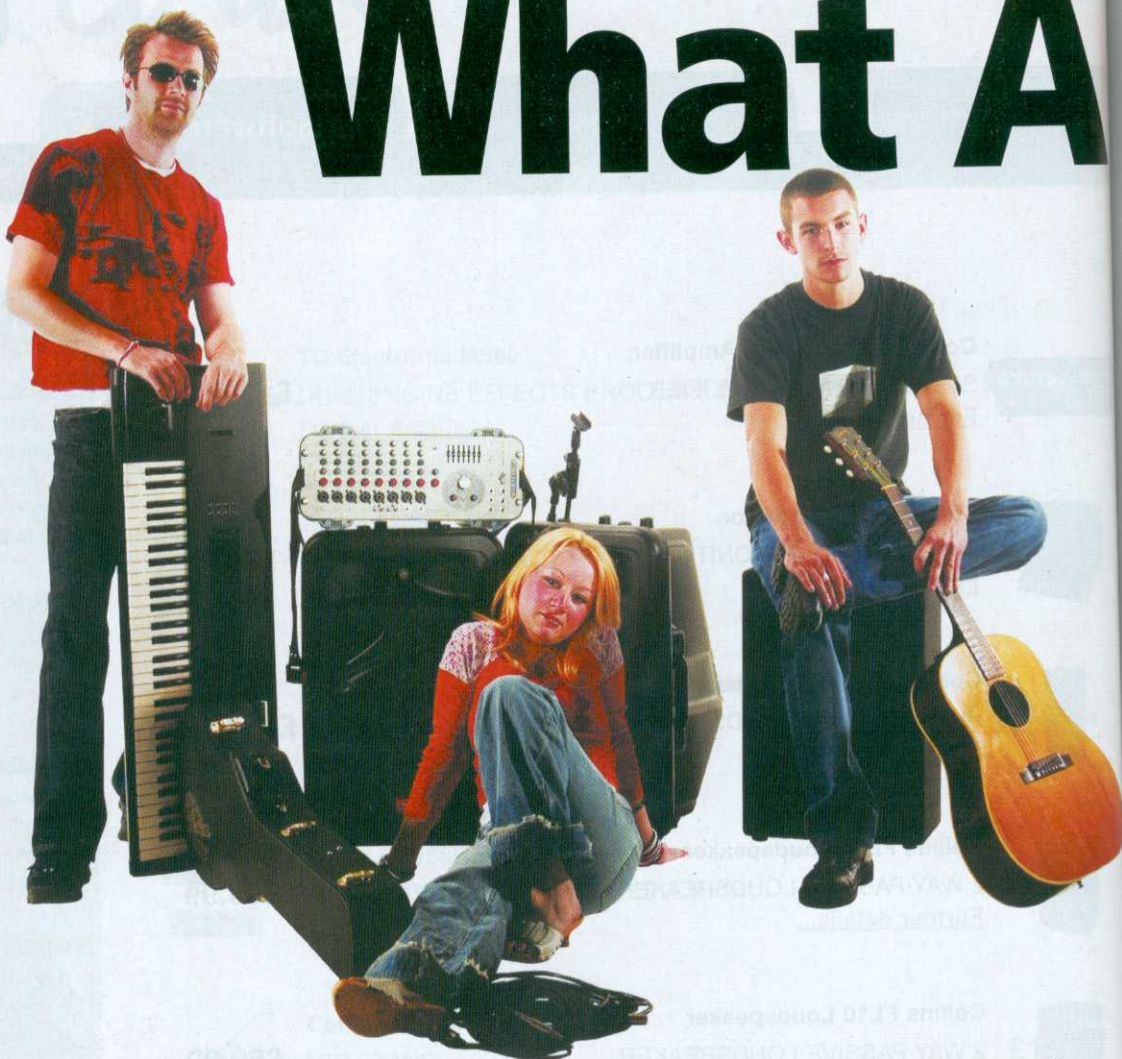


What A



In my tenure as editor we've looked at a good few variations on the theme of portable PA – Samson's *Explorer*, Peavey's *Escort* – with a good few powered mixers along the way... But... I don't think I've ever been quite as keen to get my mitts on one of these systems as I was to see the *GigRac* in action.

Why? Because I like Soundcraft kit for its sturdiness and well thought-out design (the E12 mixer that we reviewed a while back was great), and the idea of a 300 or 600 Watt powered mixer, built in FX and EQ in a box that you can throw over your shoulder – making it one half of your rehearsal/small gig setup – is a piece of kit with potential for the pub/bar-gigging musician (or maybe even busker) that we can easily see.

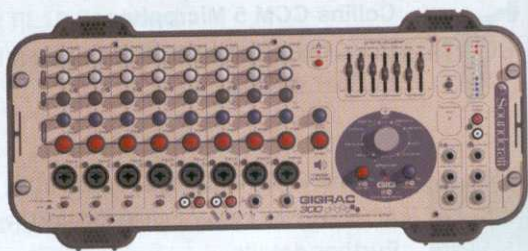
'300 REASONS

The review item that we have, a *GigRac 300*, is the smaller of the siblings – providing (you guessed it) 300 Watts of amplification into a mono output (no sweeping stereo pads then, for all you solo keyboard players). As I understand it, this halving of power and output channels is the only difference between this model and the bigger '600 unit (which knocks out 2 x 300 Watts in stereo). The output to the speakers, situated at the rear of the *GigRac*'s metallic enclosure, is via Speakon sockets – a nice professional touch, and to my mind downright near essential for PA systems that are only for temporary use

(where the risk of leads being pulled out is exponentially increased by often less-than-perfect positioning compromises). These outputs are connected in serial, with a minimum load of 4ohms. Also on the *GigRac*'s back panel is the on/off rocker switch, kettle-type IEC power input and a hatch for access to the fuse.

All of the *GigRac*'s functionality is on the beige/oatmeal/old gold/I dunno hued front fascia, and there's plenty to get through. From left to right you first get the eight mid/line channels – these afford connection of mono XLR and 1/4" jacks (all eight), stereo RCA phonos (channels 5 and 6) or stereo 1/4" jack (channels 6 and 7) according to requirements.

Each channel then affords the same control to the incoming signal, apart from 1-4 which are augmented with a -20dB Pad switch to deal with especially hi input signals. After this, each channel has (top to bottom), a bass and treble EQ control and FX level control (for mixing external effects that can be rigged up via a 1/4" jack) and then two volume controls for sending the channel's signal to either the master output or the monitor



Carry On!

The idea of the portable PA, or powered mixer is not a new one – but have any of them ever been as funky as Soundcraft's GigRac – probably not, John Moore thinks.

output – making setting up a good onstage mix an absolute doddle (especially for those less than *au fait* with PA mixing, as there's none of that pesky 'bus' terminology and routing to deal with). To the right of the main mixer section there is a toggle switch to activate +48V phantom power for the mic inputs, should you require it – this would seem especially useful for acoustic musicians who'd want to benefit from a quality stage condenser mic to capture the tone of their pride and joy.

The GigRac's effects are accessible via a rotary knob – offering 8 options, with controls to offer an effect mix level to both master and monitor out (they are not assignable to individual channels) with the FX on/off toggle switch also operable via a footswitch.

There's also a 7-band graphic EQ that can be applied across the master output, and the option to route either the master or the monitor mix to the GigRac's internal amplifier (meaning that for bigger shows, you can use your own PA setup (and the GigRac's amps to handle your foldback, whilst sending a mix to a bigger PA).

There are RCA outs for recording, a 1/4" jack for phones, and two further jack outs for monitor and master mix outputs to external amplification.

PERFORMANCE

Well, that's what it's all about really isn't it... Let me put it like this, if you can rig up a stereo or video, you can rig up the GigRac... If you can cook a lasagne, you could get a good mix out of this kit. Everything to do with the operation of this system is simple and effective, from the channel controls – which do a good job of providing the right inputs and shaping the sound as required – to the FX to the output, the Graphic EQ right down to the clipping and limiting circuitry. A joy to use.



We had the GigRac rigged up with two passive speakers and an active wedge monitor – and I'd like to say that setting up a foldback mix has never been so self-explanatory on ANY other mixer I've used, and the ability to easily alter the FX mix on this channel will also be a joy for many. Of course, the task of simplifying the task is made easier by the stripped-back configuration... But it does make you scream "why can't everything be this simple."

Yes, it's an old concept, the powered rackmount mixer – we've seen them in rehearsal rooms across the country from the year dot... I've just never come across one that did it so well. The 300 Watts of amplification is clean and clear, and through some decent cabs, can kick up a nice amount of dust – the provision of another line out to feed to augmenting powered speakers is a completely necessary godsend. It also means that you can take the GigRac to the biggest of venues and, as long as you're power prepared, know that it will still do the job for you. The output EQ is limited, but mostly effective, meaning that whilst it is not accurate enough to cut feedback frequencies, it will shape the overall sound to a degree that leaves you able to deal with some room problems (or just warm everything up a little).

The GigRac's effects perfectly embody the ethos of the kit as whole – their mix level, along with that of the send level to the external FX out, is controlled by the same FX level pot on the mix channel. This is useable, but not ideal – however believe me, I've used plenty of mixers with a 100+ preset effects (assignable to all manner of channels and busses) where 80%+ of them are unusable as anything more than special effects (i.e. completely useless when you only have 1 FX processor). The GigRac's effects on the other hand may be sparse and global, but they are wonderfully understated and all 100% useable (though some are really instrument only – like the Rev/Chorus algorithm), exactly what the average performer needs. Which is pretty much the tagline I'd use for the GigRac range.

CONCLUSION

Soundcraft have hit the nail on the head with the GigRac, a simple, funky little mixing system that just does everything really well. They've not fallen into the trap of trying to pack the kitchen sink into it – instead they have concentrated on the features that a small gigging performer would need and have done them really well. The GigRac is not the cure-all to everybody's PA requirements, it is what it is – a very small portable PA system – and some people will find it frustratingly under spec'd... But to those who fall into its intended market, the GigRac will be indispensable.

The Score

KEYNOTES

- Integrated mixer, effects and amplification for small bands and solo performers, the GigRac 300 offers total power output of 300Watts into 4 Ω, the GigRac 600 is 2x 300W into 4 Ω
- 8x Mic/line in via balanced XLR/1/4" jack combi connectors, 2-band EQ (bass and Treble offer +/-15dB at 80Hz and 12kHz respectively). Of these 8 channels there are 2x line in via RCA phono (channels 5 to 6), and additional 1/4" jack connections on channels 7-8 for connection of stereo instruments. FX bus in, footswitch and submix in on 1/4" jack
- Main out to speakers via Neutrik Speakon connections, record out on RCA phono, phones via 1/4" jack, main and monitor out on 1/4" jack 7-band graphic EQ, switchable to main or monitor out (+/- 10dB of cut boost @ 63, 125, 500, 1.5k, 3.5k, 8k and 15k Hz)
- Built in FX unit offering a choice of 8 digital effects (5 reverb variants, 2 echo/delays, and a chorus/reverb) can be sent to main or monitor mix individually
- Measures 394.4mm x 177mm x 262.8mm, GigRac 300 weighs 11.5kg and GigRac 600 weighs 12.7kg, comes w/ injection moulded carrying case with shoulder strap

Price:

GigRac 300 £352

GigRac 600 £470

HIGH NOTES

- ▲ Portable, powerful PA system that looks as cool as it sounds – great mic channels, quality FX and graphic EQ
- ▲ Comfortable carrycase option, but also rackmountable for more permanent residences
- ▲ Easy to operate for the novice...
- ▲ Yet plenty of professional I/O connection features like Speakons on the main out to speakers – not to mention phantom power
- ▲ Separate FX to main and monitor mixes makes getting on stage sound a lot easier

LOW NOTES

- ▼ It may be a good one, but at the end of the day it's a rackmount mixer – so experienced PA users will feel restricted, eventually
- ▼ No sweepable EQ
- ▼ Mono output on GigRac 300 is restricting for keyboard players, who won't benefit from the stereo RCA or 1/4" ins

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