

AR-133

Active DI Box - Trevor Curwen Reviews for Mix Magazine

What we like:

- Top Sound Quality
- Rugged Construction
- Superb design

What we don't like:

- Giving it back

Overall:

- Everything a DI Box should be. Highly recommended

"Direct injection boxes are boring but essential items in studio and live work. Most commonly used to get the direct output from bass guitar or keyboard into the mic inputs of a mixing desk, all a DI box should really do is get as clear a signal as possible from A to B.

There is a school of thought these days, however, that believes that a DI box can do more than this and improve the signal in some way.

There are now a whole slew of expensive DI boxes on the market for just this purpose, many of which will give you an excellent signal, but few of them justify the extra price you have to pay.

The BSS AR-133 has no such pretensions. It's a solid workmanlike box whose whole aim in life is to pass a signal through without degrading it in any way. The AR-133 is the successor to BSS's supremely popular AR-116, which has been an industry standard for some time now, and it improves on that design in mainly ergonomic ways.

Overview

First of all, this unit is built like a brick shithouse. The curved metal case is extremely solid and is protected at each end by thick rubber heads, giving it an appearance not unlike a First World War tank. These rubber bits actually raise the chassis of the unit off the floor by a good 1/2 inch or so. This is very practical for two reasons: firstly, you can run cables underneath it, which is very useful on a congested live stage, and secondly, several 133's could be stacked on top of one another, saving space. Gaffa tape a few of these together and you have a neat solution to getting the outputs from a large keyboard rig into a mixing desk.

One problem with the old 116's was that all their switches and sockets were on the top surface, good for checking all the settings at a glance maybe, but not so good when the inevitable spilt liquids seeped into them. The 133 gets around this by having all the sockets and switches at its ends.

At one end there are the inputs, available on an unbalanced jack socket and a parallel unbalanced XLR, and the three position pad switch (0dB, 20dB and 40dB). Also at this end is the input link jack which is parallel wired with the main 1/4 inch input and serves to send the input signal elsewhere, usually to the musicians onstage amplifier in a live situation.

At the other end of the box is the transformer balanced XLR output and an earth lift switch, as well as a power on switch and LED. This switch is used for both phantom and battery power (a PP3 stashed away in an adjacent compartment, opened with a knurled screw). For situations where the box is going to be used with phantom power all the time, there is an internal link which can be set so that the box will work regardless of the position of the power switch, which always stands the chance of being knocked, although the protruding rubber end cheeks would go a long way towards thwarting that.

Verdict

So what does it sound like? Well, if it actually sounded like anything it wouldn't be doing its job properly.

Basically, what went in one end came out the other, degraded in no way as far as could be determined.

Acoustic guitar, bass and keyboards all came out crisp, clear and clean with no hint of added distortion or otherwise.

There are no criticisms to be made of this box.

With its predecessor, the 116, the only real problems occur when it's been dropped or had things spilt on it. This box, with its radical design features should hold up a lot better than the 116 in those respects, and its pretty certain that this will go on to be another industry standard."