DIGITECH JAMMAN
WANNA LOOP YOUR LICKS AND RIFFS LIKE THE BIG BOYS DO? THEN READ ON...  WORDS: SIMON BRADLEY

Loops? I'm not into dance music, you know...

C'mon, now. Musicians of all creeds use loops to add flavour to their songs; these days. Think Brit and Radiohead and look at all those 12-stringed Mg Hammerers – and his huge trousers – if you can. Not many guitarists would fancy lugging a sample rack along with their amplifiers and effects to every gig, which usually means making use of backing CDs if you want your tunes to be sprinkled with loops. Hmmm, that all sounds a bit Milli Vanilli to us...

Thanks to Digitech's JamMan, players on a budget - yes, that's you and the good folk of TG - can now get into the cool loops in real time without clearing out their bank accounts. So let's take a closer look...

OK, what's the sizzle?
The JamMan has the capacity to record up to 99 separate loops and recall them instantly, offstage or in the studio. It's a floor-based pedal that allows you to record, overdub and access the loops with your feet: no need to bend down and blindly stab at small buttons. At the heart of the JamMan is its generous storage facility. Most other stompboxes have limited memory; the JamMan supports standard Type I CompactFlash cards and the bigger the card you use, the more loops you can actually store. As an example, if you upgrade to a two-GB card the unit offers 384 minutes of total record time. That's over six hours worth!

Is this a guitar mag or a high-tech mag?
The line between the two genres has become blurred, so you'd better get used to it. Take the unit's computer-compatibility, for example. It's possible to link it up to either a Mac or PC via the JamMan's USB port. From there, a simple process allows you to transfer your own loops from the JamMan's CompactFlash card straight onto your desktop with the minimum of fuss. The loops are stored as wav files - much higher quality than scratched old MP3s - and you can chop and change the contents of the JamMan's new Hercules in memory at will.

Do you need a degree to work the thing?
The JamMan should chill the technophobes amongst you – it really won't take long till you're looping like the Red Arrows. As with all units, you should at least flick through the accompanying manual so that any problems you may come across in due course shouldn't take too long to fix. Out of the box, the JamMan has several pre-recorded bass and drum loops you can experiment with, which is a great place to start. There are 99 pigeonholes into which loops can be stored, and you can select any of them via the, er, Select knob. By following the series of LEDs on the front-panel, you will, with practice, know where you are in the recording at all times. As we said, using both footswitches for starting and stopping recording, plus overdubbing and playback, you can get the job done without taking your eyes off your audience.

You can record from external devices too (via the aux input) and you can use the plethora of sample CDs available. If you're in a metal band and want to open your set with the stereotypical crash of thunder, you no longer need to entrust your grand entrance to the often disinterested guy on the sound desk. Instead, you can load up the JamMan with all sorts of special effects and recall them at will.

What's the bad news?
An onboard guitar tuner would have been useful, as would have been some sort of method for altering the tempo of a loop in real time rather than fumbling for the Tempo button under dim stage lights. But we're just nipping, to be honest. It is worth bearing in mind that there's no sort of FX processing available here. That means if you plug your guitar straight into the JamMan, the tone will be clean and ultra-dry and you really don't want to be artificially overdubbing digital equipment because, quite frankly, it sounds pants! Obviously you can use your usual effects and even an amp DI to obtain different guitar tones and, once you're set, you'll find yourself looping and sampling for hours.

So it's a useful piece of kit then?
Haven't you been listening? It's acesome! If you're buying it at the bit for the chance to include great-sounding loops in your music and live set list, the JamMan will solve all your problems. Remember that other loopers of this ilk and price don't allow for the downloading of memory onto your computer and, for that reason, we're certainly up for a Jam-man.

FOR: Easy to use... after a bit of practice; huge memory; awesome live tool AGAINST: Can be confusing at first; the tempo button is a bit small; no tuner or onboard FX

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