

LINE 6 M9 STOMPBOX MODELER

PRICE
£378.35



All the power of Line 6 stompbox modelling technology packed into a single compact unit? Daniel Hodgson eyes up a few models

We took a look at Line 6's M13 Stompbox Modeler way back in issue 87, and were very impressed by what the modelling giants had managed to achieve. The M13 essentially collects the sounds from the company's range of 'stompbox modeler' pedals and rolls them into a single package.

The idea is to combine the experience of using individual stompboxes with some of the benefits of a multi-effects unit such as patch recall and multiple, tempo-synced effects. The new M9 is significantly smaller than the M13, but it sacrifices very little in the way of sounds. For those who liked the idea of the M13, but not its massive bulk, step this way.

Construction & Features

Like the M13, the M9 is constructed from thick sheet metal throughout and features no less than seven chunky footswitches on its two-tiered surface. These are grouped into three pairs, each of which allows you to select between two separate patches for each of the three 'FX Units.' The final footswitch, at the bottom right corner, offers a very handy tap tempo control, which works over all activated delay, modulation and filter effects that have been set to respond to it.

Rather than the M13's row of four displays and associated controls – one for each of the bigger unit's four 'FX Units' – the M9 makes do with a single display and six knobs. The first of these is both a combined push-button and notched rotary control. Pushing it cycles between the different effects groups, with the display's backlight changing to indicate the group currently selected – green for delay, blue for modulation, yellow for overdrive, purple for

filter effects and orange for reverb – with over 100 models available in total and even more on the way thanks to the unit's ability to be updated via the Line 6 website.

The notched knob then allows you to select a model within that set, with the other five controls adjusting specific parameters depending on the effect selected, with their function clearly shown on the display. The relevant information for the last effect activated is shown on screen but, perhaps most cleverly of all, the M9 saves settings as if they were on a physical stompbox, so when you return to a specific location – for example, effect A in FX Unit one – the settings will be exactly as you left them.

This goes a long way to settling our initial concern that the M9, by offering only one set of knobs shared between all three FX Units in contrast to the M13's separate set of controls for each section, would lack the hands-on stompbox feel of its predecessor. True, you can't adjust an FX Unit's settings without selecting it first, but Line 6 has made the M9 as intuitive to use as possible. The



The M9's single LCD displays the settings of the current effect selected



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benefits of a more compact unit are also considerable, especially if you're used to playing on cramped stages or plan to add it to an already-populated pedalboard.

The M9 allows up to three effects to be used simultaneously – one from each 'FX Unit' – with an alternative for each effect engine just a footstep away. There are up to six of these virtual pedalboards, or 'scenes' as Line 6 calls them, and you can even set it up so that each of the six main footswitches instantly changes to a different scene, a little more like the traditional multi-effects 'patch', if you like. Just like the number of effects, the number of 'scenes' is also increased via web updates.

The 28-second looper is activated by holding down the tap tempo switch. There are separate footswitches for recording/overdubbing and playing/stopping a loop, plus a 'play once' switch, which finishes the loop the next time it reaches its end. There's also provision to undo one layer of

recording, halve the speed of the loop or even reverse it. What's more, you can use any of the M9's effects in conjunction with the looper – start your loop with one set, hold the tap tempo footswitch down to return to standard mode and then go back to the looper with a completely different effects chain. Simple, yet very powerful in the right hands... or feet!

The rear panel has stereo in and out jacks as well as a MIDI in and out, and provision for two expression pedals to be used, either of which can be assigned to any number of variables. However, the M9 misses out on the M13's stereo effects loop, which is a shame. Many players might have preferred to see at least a mono effects loop available in place of the M9's existing MIDI ports.

Sounds

Some players may scoff at the idea of digital modelling as opposed to analogue effects, but the truth is that there isn't as much in it as

some would have us think – the M9 performs just as well as many mid-level analogue stompboxes, in our opinion, and significantly better than some of the cheaper options on the market. The sheer quantity of different effects packed into this small box is also seriously impressive.

The compression and drive models are surprisingly strong, with all the usual flavours available – Tube Screamer-style overdrives, RAT-type distortions, and Big Muff-y fuzzes are on offer, and all sound and even feel remarkably close to their target tones, though there are rather a lot of quite fizzy fuzzes to be found. These sounds might not replace a treasured boutique dirt box, but the 17 flavours of distortion on offer are not to be sniffed at.

The M9's real strong suit is modulation. These effects sound great in almost every case, with models of well-known classics such as the MXR Phase 90 and Boss VB-2 Vibrato really standing out, and there are some fantastic Leslie-style warbles too. Some of the filter effects are a bit crazy, but we can imagine them inspiring a lot of players in many ways, and the wah models should keep fans of that particular effect happy.

The M9's delay and reverb effects are similarly eclectic and effective, and although some background noise is present, it's nothing to worry about. There are plenty of fantastic delays to get your teeth into, both of the warm, vintage variety and the more modern, crisp type, and the reverb effects add real depth to a lot of the tones. On top of all this, we find the looper function to be amazingly simple to use, adding yet another string to the M9's bow.

Conclusion

Many players used to be happy sitting on one side of the fence or the other – single stompers for their sound quality and simplicity, or digital multi-effects for their variety and functionality. Digital models are getting better all the time, however, and when they're dressed up like stand-alone effects it's hard not to be impressed.

While the M13 was designed to replace a whole pedalboard of stompers, the M9 seems like the ideal candidate to sit alongside a few well-chosen boutique effects, and some players might find that its slightly limited functionality actually suits their style better. It's a brilliant compromise in terms of size, sound and usability. **GB**



LINE 6 M9 STOMPBOX MODELER

Price: £378.35

Built in: China

Type: Digital modelling multi-effects

Features: Distortion, mod, filter, delay & verb effects types, 100+ stompbox models, 3 effects engines with 2 patches per scene, 24 scenes total, looper function, tuner, tap tempo, mono/stereo input & output, MIDI in & out, 2 x expression pedal inputs

Power: 9V AC adapter only (included)

Dimensions: 61(h)x267(w)x165(d) mm

CONTACT DETAILS

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GB VERDICT

GOLD STARS

- ★ Loads of great-sounding effects
- ★ Intuitive to use
- ★ Fantastic looper function

BLACK MARKS

- A little background noise in some instances
- A mono effects loop would have been nice

IDEAL FOR...

Anyone seeking a compact, powerful integrated effects unit

GB RATING



Via its trio of 'FX Units', the M9 allows you to use up to three effects at once