

WHAT IS IT?

Version 10 of the widely adopted DAW

CONTACT

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HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 New plug-in hire service
- 2 The new mixer – it's huge
- 3 The Echo – sounds dirty

PRICING

Various upgrade offers available, check at www.avid.com



Avid Pro Tools 10 | £539

Avid (nee Digidesign) continue their quest to bring high-end recording to the natives. **Tim Oliver** wonders how you can better the best

The last few revisions of Pro Tools has seen Avid gradually acknowledge that the native environment is catching up with their formerly high-end professional DAE/TDM recording technology. Now with the release of Pro Tools 10 and the announcement of discontinued support for TDM and introduction of the new HDX audio engine and AAX (Avid Audio eXtension) format, Avid have finally come to terms with the fact that going native is just as good in terms of speed

and stability as the HD systems that pro studios have been based on for the last 15 years or so. This is fantastic news for home and project studios who can now enjoy the recording power that only the studio artists have been enjoying to this point. Power to the people!

Get it on

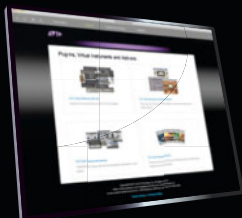
Pro Tools 10 is authorised with a USB iLok key that comes with the package if you buy the disk version. Installing is a straightforward, and surprisingly quick,

prompted process and you'll be up and running in no time. The pack also comes with Device Driver software and an 8GB DVD of genre-defined audio loops. As with Pro Tools 9, this software version happily runs on your current ASIO or Core Audio interface as well as on your computers internal audio engine. Avid prescribe their own interfaces for best quality of course, that's if you can't afford to go HD, but for more on the higher versions see the boxout. If you're a Core Audio or ASIO interface user you'll be delighted to hear that there is now a Low Latency Monitoring possibility allowing you to monitor through a record enabled track. It'll save the faff of track muting etc but this only applies to interfaces with a built-in mixer and if you're a Mac user it doesn't apply to the Pro Tools Aggregate I/O. Also any inserted plug-ins are automatically muted which is a shame if you're wanting to DI a guitar through an amp simulator plug-in.

Pro Tools 10 introduces plenty of new 'under-the-bonnet' features including a new session file format '.ptx' which is backward compatible with older versions if need be. A major one is the quadrupling of the Delay Compensation Engine (non-TDM only) which was woefully inadequate before resulting in all sorts of timing and phasing issues if you weren't careful. Another plus is the introduction of 32-bit floating point audio file support

Pro Tools 10: The Top 5 New Features

Since going Native with Pro Tools 9, home and project studio owners have been given full access to 15 year's worth of pro digital recording development. Version 10 builds on that legacy with some revolutionary concepts and more practical improvements. Here are our favourite new features



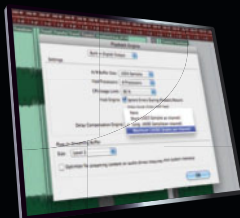
In-App Web Browser and Market Place

Don't have the plug-in you need for that perfect vocal sound? Now you can go directly from the insert of your vocal channel to the Avid store and buy or hire the one you need. If you don't want to buy it you can hire one for £10 or so for a couple of days and bounce it down to a solid audio file. How tempting is that?



Avid Channel Strip Plug-in

A workaday plug-in with four-band EQ, High-Pass and Low-Pass Filters, Compression/Limiting and Expansion/Gating. One of these on each channel and you have a fully spec'd old-school mixing desk, the sort of thing you could only dream about a few years ago. A bunch of presets get you started and a few tweaks can shape it for the particular instrument or vocal. Swap the elements around and use another signal to sidechain the compressor if you want.



Extended Automatic Delay Compensation

Delay compensation allows for the time it takes for a plug-in to process the audio so that it's played back in time with the rest of the multi-track session. In Pro Tools it took a long time coming to the LE version and then the maximum time allowed wasn't ever enough due to limitations of TDM, often maxing out with four or five inserts resulting in timing and phasing issues or fiddling with user offsets. Now ADC has been quadrupled to a maximum of 16,383 @ 44.1 and 48kHz on non-TDM systems. Native beats TDM – brilliant!



Buss Interrogation

Commonly on a big session you lose track of what aux buss is going to what effect and you get a stray echo, for example, that you can't trace. Now with Buss Interrogation you can show all tracks routed to a specific buss to find the culprit. It will also be handy for making sure all tracks that should be, are routed to the mix buss, so that your last guitar overdub actually makes it to the final mixdown and isn't left routed to the main output.



AudioSuite Improvements

AudioSuite plug-ins aren't real time, they render the results over the source audio file. The new improved version preserves fades and actually processes outside the audio field so you can draw the audio out like on a recorded track. Further and most excitingly, a new reverse feature creates rendered reverse reverb and delay effects cutting out the faff it used to be.



SPECS

System Requirements:

Mac: Avid qualified computer (see www.avid.com for details), OS 10.6.7 or later

PC: Avid qualified computer (see www.avid.com for details), Windows 7 Home Premium, Professional or Ultimate edition with Windows 7 Service Pack 1

Both: RAM – 2GB minimum, 4GB recommended, 15GB Hard disk space for installation

to give you more headroom thus hopefully avoiding internal clipping. It'll also take up a third more disk space and clog up the streaming bandwidth which might be a problem for some drives involving big session sizes.

A session now allows mixed file formats so you're not having to constantly convert any imported audio and what's more PT10 supports Stereo Interleaved files like Logic and Cubase do, for happier co-operation. Support is further extended to the newer WAVE formats: Extensible File Format for multiple surround audio channels and for RF64 files which allow greater than the standard 4GB WAV file size. Both these features add credence to the notion that Avid are shifting their focus from music production to audio post-production film work.

Further evidence comes from the re-naming of audio 'regions' to 'clips' and the full 24-hour timeline which is unlikely to be of use in the Pop world, well... hopefully not. Talking of clips, there's now something called 'clip-based gain' which lets you apply discreet levels to audio clips (nee regions). The gain for a clip can be static, i.e. it's adjusted universally for

The Crest of a Plug-in Wave

As we slowly and inexorably reach the crest of the technological revolution the possibility of big-brushstroke features recedes into distant memory.

What we're mostly getting now are small refinements and fine-tuning of existing features to match the faster processors and nothing much to go 'wow' about. Some cynics might suggest we're also simply getting re-inventions of existing features in order to keep us spending. This view has surfaced a lot about the upcoming



change from RTAS which is the current native plug-in format and which is still supported in PT10 to the new 'AAX native' plug-in format which will take over completely from RTAS in the next version. The same applies to the transition of the accelerated formats from TDM to 'AAX DSP'. The

idea behind AAX is that it bridges between the current 32-bit version and the expected 64-bit Pro Tools 11. It's also intended to simplify plug-in development and make it easier for adapting them to the accelerated HDX platform. Change is always a good thing right?

the clip, or dynamic in that the gain changes with time. It's slightly different to automation in that it is applied pre-insert. This is useful for example to even out a vocal recorded at different levels prior to compression or to even out a guitar part so that a subsequent

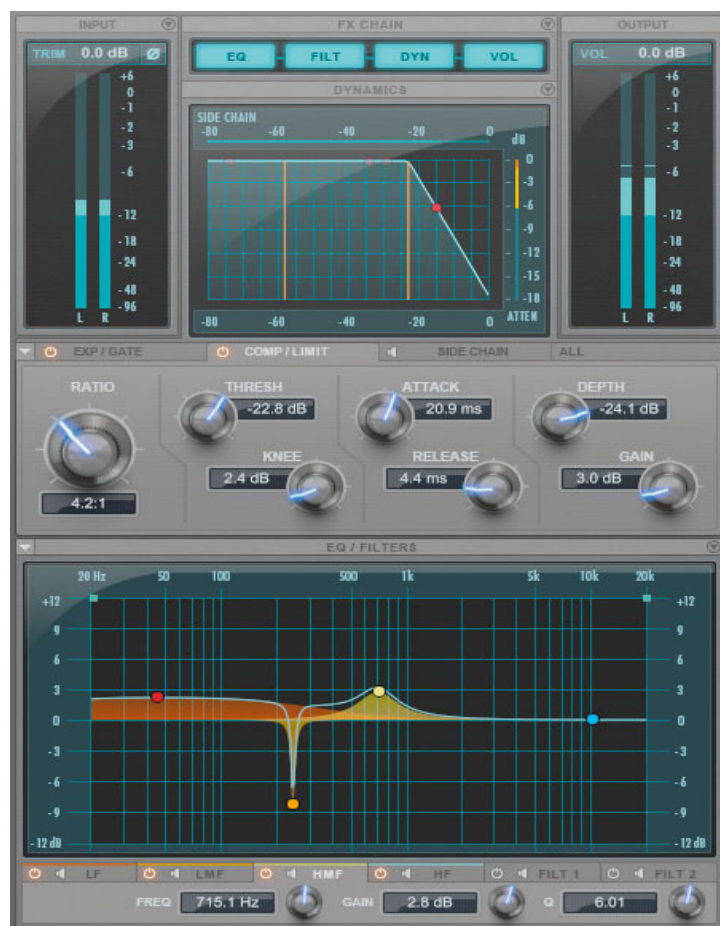
drive character on an amp is even. It's more appealing to users coming from other DAWs who are used to this feature, but it won't make you go 'wow'. Another one that won't be real-time fades. Before PT10 all fades were rendered and put into a fade file folder. Now they're performed on the fly and the only impact that'll have on us users is on start-up when the session can't find the existing rendered fade files.

Bang a gong

To hale the arrival of the new AAX plug-in format, PT10 includes a couple of new AAX native plugs: the Channel Strip and the Mod Delay III. The former is a fully loaded EQ and dynamics processor with four band EQ, top and bottom filters, expansion and compression. Usefully you can shuffle around the signal flow and you can drag the graphics to make changes. The delay is exactly the same feature set as the existing Mod Delay II with a much more attractive interface.

A mix feature that will be useful to power users is 'buss interrogation' that lets you select and show tracks assigned to specific inputs, outputs or busses, useful if, for example, you want to see all the tracks routed to your mix buss or you want to find all the tracks with sends routing to a specific effect. There's little more to wow about.

Solo and Mute status indicator lights on the transport window tell you when a track or tracks are soloed or muted somewhere within the session. Useful if you have a lot of tracks open but in the past, dulled Mute buttons on unsolo'd



Avid's new Channel Strip plug-in emulates a classic console signal path



Audio regions are now 'clips' and there's also a new pre-insert clip-specific volume automation option

tracks have always given a rogue solo away. Importing and exporting options have been expanded including the option to 'Export selected tracks as New Session' which anyone who's suffered trying to create a more concise session to hand to a remixer say, will appreciate

the value. You can also bounce directly to iTunes and directly to SoundCloud if you're that brave or foolish.

Future tools

Without the introduction of 64-bit processing and with few exciting new

features you might rightly be thinking that there's not much to shout about in Pro Tools 10 and shouldn't this simply be a revision to version 9.

But Avid need to splash the arrival of their new AAX format and pave the way for the new HDX system and the

pain of change that that's going to cause existing users who've invested heavily in the soon to be redundant TDM technology.

The thing is, Pro Tools is already a great DAW and is clearly way ahead of the game. It used to be a one-trick audio recording pony but improved MIDI editing and new included instruments make it the prime all-rounder and with native processing maturing to cope with what Pro Tools throws at it, the choice of which native DAW platform to buy into is still a no-brainer. **FM**

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The Pro Tools Family

PT10 SE: a stripped down version for beginners that often comes bundled with M-Audio interfaces.

PT10 MP: M-Powered as was, this version requires an M-Audio interface for operation. It offers almost the full complement of Pro Tools features.

PT10: The subject of this review, this is a full-featured pro version that runs with or without an audio interface. It'll run happily on your internal PC/Mac audio engine or on a Core Audio or ASIO interface. The more you spend on the interface, generally, the

better the D/A conversion quality and monitoring.

PT10 HD Native: Comes with a PCI card that harnesses the native power of your computer. Very low latency recording.

PT10 HD: The end of the line for the TDM audio

engine. Supports TDM, RTAS and AAX native plug-ins. From the next revision it will be...

PT10 HDX: The new top of the range. An all new audio engine and support for AAX DSP, AAX Native, RTAS and AudioSuite plug-ins.



FutureMusic VERDICT

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

No 64-bit and not a lot of thrilling new features, but AAX and HDX are the future for PT adopters.

ALTERNATIVES



Apple Logic Pro 9

£140 (download version)
Mac-only native DAW with a MIDI editor to die for and amazing packaged instruments and plug-ins. It falls down on the audio recording side.

www.apple.com



Steinberg Cubase 6

£500
It's always been the less talented sibling but it's been around a long time and retains core support from the old faithful.

www.steinberg.net



Propellerhead Reason

from 279 euro
Propellerhead Reason goes from strength to strength, now incorporating full audio recording, but it has a way to go to compete with Pro Tools despite the great modular instruments.

www.propellerheads.se