REVIEWS....

Intimidation Apex

Following on from the worldwide success of their Blue DJ Mixer, Intimidation have launched Apex - their first budget price unit (£200). However, rather than this being a slimline Blue, Intimidation have included two distinctive analogue Special Effects in the Apex artillery - a warm sounding phaser-type effect (controlled by 'X-Factor' knobs) and the 'Sound Shaft' - a novel auto gate effect similar to their Slaughter Chamber found on the very first (now highly collectable) Intimidation Challenger DJ Mixer...

Virtually every innovative feature Intimidation have developed for their mixers during the last four years have been plagiarised by rival third parties. However, this time, Intimidation plan to foil the copycat reverse engineering marketeers out there by using proprietary Surface Mount technology and extending their portfolio of patents to include their X-Factor and Sound Shaft technologies.

The first, most notable thing about Apex, when comparing it to Intimidation's Blue and Chrome Don II, is that it is very small - in fact, this is Intimidation's first non 19" rack mounting product. Apex has been designed as an entry-level DJ Mixer and as such they have consciously limited the physical size of Apex - no doubt with the novice bedroom in mind who may very well be cramped for space.

However, the square, shallow, attractive white housing of Apex doesn't mean you're short of creative mixing tools - Intimidation have made sure their patented Rotary Kills are their - this time presented in a logical Tops/Mids/Bass vertical arrangement.

The Summit...

The Apex is essentially a two channel mixer with rotary level pots rather than channel faders. The 'X' and the 'Y' channels have no selectors between phono (turntable) and line (CD level) - it's possible to have a vinyl input and a CD source playing through the same channel.

There's no input bargraph meters either - Apex uses a new Intimidation 'shorthand' level monitoring system which has just two LEDs per channel - a green one which confirms the presence and intensity of the input source and a bright red LED which indicates when clipping or distortion has occurred. Basically, for optimal signal to noise performance, Apex should have the green LEDs on each input blinking at you, in sympathy with the input source's transient peaks.

Impact Mixing...

We found that Apex gives you more than enough input level control even though they have done away with faders, as at the top of each channel there is a PFG Pre Fade Gain control. The channel gain pots are larger than all the other rotary pots on the front panel and are conveniently situated either side of the crossfader.

The crossfader is suitably loose - though not of the seductively slick, almost transparent, friction-free performance which the crossfaders on the first production run of Blues had.

The Punch In buttons act as traditional Transformer controls, superimposing the opposite channel's signal. The two effects each have a selector button. As soon as the FX On switch is depressed, the Phaser like sound is immediately routed across the stereo mix. The two rotary controls interact with each other and sort of resemble the Rate and Width parameters of a typical Jimi Hendrix 1970's phaser. However, with clever surface mount technology, Intimidation have created unpredictable frequency sweeps and orgiastic, hollow 'tube' type sounds from a set of electronics which require just two knobs!

The Attack button turns on the Factor X knobs which immediately start cutting the beat up. The top X Factor pot controls the 'space' inbetween the gaps (Gate Closed Time), and the second knob governs the 'mark', or Open Gate/rate. This means that aggressive, chainsaw type shut-downs can be performed with the use of just two knobs. Combine the Attacking X Factor with the Sound Shaft Phaser whilst isolating fundamental sections of the frequency spectrum (accentuating hihats, for example) using the Rotary Kills and you'll know what Apex is all about!

WipeOut 97...

Again we've seen this South London company play the game of the Big Boys, releasing updated, fully featured products at less than the retail price of their previous incarnations. Apex is the only £200 DJ mixer with Rotary Kills and a dedicated audio FX section. It has a good s/n ratio, elegant PCB design, loose crossfader and can Pump Up The Volume in ways which one can barely dream imaginable.

This is not just a compact DJ mixer - it's a DJ Performance Tool.

By Chris Everard
Technologica Magazine