



## Radial 500 Series Modules

Hot on the heels of our Workhorse review, **GEORGE SHILLING** looks at new module offerings from the Canadian company.

Radial's 500 Series modules are of course compatible with any 500 Series rack, but some include functions that employ the Omniport connection to expand

their possibilities further when used with Radial's own Workhorse rack (*Resolution* V10.3). All of these Canadian-built modules carry a three-year transferable warranty, and are certainly built to

withstand the knocks and bumps of commercial studio or on-the-road operations. Although they are perhaps a little unsophisticated in the aesthetics department, a lot of obvious thought has gone into maximising their practical value. And all come at reasonable cost, so whether you need guitarist-friendly problem-solvers or some fun toys and tools for recording or live, you can go Radial Ga-Ga and use a Workhorse to plough efficiently through those audio tasks.



**POWERPRE** (UK£465 + VAT) — Following 18 months of development and many revisions, the PowerPre microphone preamp delivers some novel (some hidden) features in Radial's most expensive module, aiming to deliver 'the warmth of fully discrete, transformer coupled electronics with the lowest possible noise'. The transformer is a 'vintage' Hammond broadcast output transformer. Noise is kept at bay using an Accustate Input Control that uses two potentiometers to simultaneously control gain and input sensitivity.

The front features an XLR input thoughtfully placed at the bottom to avoid cable snagging and they have even turned the Radial logo sideways to accommodate it. Phantom power is indicated with a red LED and activated by a recessed button not reachable with human fingers. A mostly good idea, but when someone helpful shouts, 'I'll unplug the mics!' you'll be scrabbling around to quickly find a biro!

There is a three-position 'Vox' toggle for preset tonal shaping. The character is smooth but somewhat dry sounding in Linear mode; there's plenty of detail and nothing harsh or unpleasant, but it's not as colourful as a Thermionic Culture valve preamp and not quite as sweet as an API, for instance. Breath mode adds a gentle treble lift and introduces a little 'air' and extra clarity, while Punch boosts the low end. Both are unsubtle but very usable variations that are quick to audition, and make for easy shaping with minimal tweaking when recording. I found that although maximum gain is only 55dB, those last 5dB as the knob reaches full tilt add noise, which is only emphasised and brightened in Breath mode.

**PROS** Clean, dry sounding preamp with tonal variations.

**CONS** A bit noisy at high gain settings.



**EXTC REAMP** (£279 + VAT) — This module is designed for inserting guitar pedal effects into recordings, providing all the proper impedance and level adjustments necessary for you to insert boxes designed to go between guitar and amplifier into a balanced line level insert point without ill effect. Front panel Send and Receive jacks are connected to a pedal (or chain of pedals) and the trim knobs have a wide range of adjustment to set levels appropriately. With Send set to minimum level, however, my Electro Harmonix Electric Mistress was still being overloaded, even with a conservatively recorded signal (-14dBFS peaks) so a Trim plug-in was needed. There's plenty of level boost available using the Receive knob on the way back in.

At the top of the module is a useful Wet/Dry blend, along with a polarity reverse button — this was required in the case of the aforementioned Electric Mistress, which like many pedals reverses the phase. The Omniport button turns the Workhorse's special connector into a TRS unbalanced

insert point for a further line level effect loop to join the party in series following the front panel Receive jack, so you could use something in the studio rack as part of the chain for added fun. Using the EXTC, I was surprised at how quietly most old pedals can perform, and this got me digging out some neglected curios which sounded stunningly clean and juicy. Colorsound Diphonizer, anyone? (*Nein Danke! Ed*)

**PROS** Unbounded fun for pedal collectors.

**CONS** Send level a trifle hot.



**JDX REACTOR** (£279 + VAT) — This module is a DI box with speaker emulation tone-shaping circuitry. It also has a mode for recording the speaker output of your guitar amplifier (head), and this slightly scary concept comes with plenty of warnings in the manual not to confuse the two modes, and to be sure to connect a speaker in Amp Mode, otherwise you might cause the JDX 'to blow up into a bazillion pieces'. Polarity reverse and earth lift are provided, as you'd expect. Using the unit as a straightforward DI with the front panel Guitar input adds speaker emulation before sending a mic level to the rack output. There is a LPF button which enables a variable treble roll-off knob. This sounds great for calming down distortion pedal fuzz to a more palatable sound, but if you want sprangly, funky Strat or similar, the tone seems lacking in treble (even with this bypassed) when compared to the Instrument input on an API 3124, for example. An LF-Ext button claims to increase the bass response to something more approximating to a 15-inch speaker, and this certainly makes things boom. A second front panel jack socket works as a handy link for feeding

an amp when recording the DI, or as a useful ReAmp output (from the rear XLR input).

Switching to Amp Mode allows you to take advantage of the tone and overdrive of an amp head, and here the first jack socket takes the speaker output from the amp, and the second socket feeds your speaker cabinet, allowing the signal to link through. A pad labelled 300W is provided for super-loud amps. This mode is useful if your amp hasn't got a DI output or similar. I tested with one that did, and plugging that into the JDX sounded nearly identical to tapping the speaker output in Amp mode. If you are simply recording some guitar, perhaps having set up an amp, you might go the whole hog and mic it up too; this box adds to your options.

**PROS** Useful speaker output recording capability.

**CONS** DI sounds less bright than some others.



**X-AMP REAMP** (£279 + VAT) — The X-Amp is a 'ReAmp' box that allows you to send recorded DI signal back out to an amplifier, or even two separate amplifiers simultaneously. The two jack outputs appear on the front and are each accompanied by an Earth Lift button and level knob. With a recorded DI track in the DAW, you can simply patch a spare DAW output directly to the rear rack input XLR, and use the level knobs to set the appropriate drive level out to each amp. Output 2 also has a polarity reverse button which might come in handy when blending two different amps. In a Workhorse, the rear panel Omniport jack becomes a DI input. The rack output then usefully provides a normal DI signal for recording, (this sounding rather brighter than the JDX) and the signal is also fed to the two ReAmp outputs, so this can also be used as a Y-splitter for the guitar signal — something not always easily achieved otherwise. ■

**PROS** Clean ReAmping and useful splitter function.

**CONS** None

#### Contact

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