



Elektron Model:Samples

£410

The Swedes' latest sampler strips back the functionality for accessibility. **Si Truss** asks if it can still pack a punch

CONTACT WHO: Elektron WEB: elektron.se **KEY FEATURES** Six-track hardware sampler with 64-step sequencer, parameter locking automation, chainable patterns, user sample upload and more. **I/O:** Stereo main output, headphone out, MIDI out and in/thru, USB



THE PROS & CONS



Some excellent sequencing tools

Compact and portable without feeling cramped

Immediate and intuitive workflow



Browser and memory is overly complex

Odd lack of info on the USB audio capabilities

Faces stiff competition from Elektron's own Digitakt sampler

There was a time when the words 'accessible' and 'Elektron' were rarely seen together. Despite a devoted cult following, the Swedish company had a deserved reputation for creating high-end gear with deep, slightly impenetrable workflows. That changed with the release of their Digitakt sampler and Digitone synth, both of which – while hardly entry level – were designed with immediacy in mind, at a sub-£1000 RRP.

Model:Samples is an even bigger departure: with a street price under £400, it's the first Elektron instrument within reach of cash-strapped bedroom producers. Its design is considerably less intimidating too. Broadly, most of the functionality is kept accessible from the front panel controls, with fewer sub-menus and under-the-hood settings to get your head around.

Understandably, with the reduced price point comes a change in design, and Model:Samples both looks and feels more 'budget' than Elektron's

previous instruments. The unit itself is mostly plastic, with chunky backlit buttons, rubber-topped rotaries and a fairly small screen providing browser and parameter info. I/O-wise, the instrument has a balanced pair of 1/4-inch jacks as a main output, along with a 1/4-inch headphone out. These are joined on the rear panel by a power input, micro-USB port and two 3.5mm MIDI ports, providing MIDI in and out/thru via a pair of included adapters.

The unit is slim, compact and fairly lightweight – at less than 1kg,

you could easily slot it into a laptop bag to create a portable production setup. A forthcoming battery pack looks set to add to the portability considerably too. Although the desktop footprint is pretty small, the layout doesn't feel cramped; each key parameter has its own, good-sized rotary, and although the pads for the sample triggers and step sequencer are fairly small, the whole unit feels ergonomically well-designed. If we're being super-critical, the abundance of plastic perhaps makes Model:Samples feel a bit cheaper

THE ALTERNATIVES



Elektron Digitakt

£610

Model:Samples' bigger sibling is pricier but adds onboard sampling, better DAW integration and deeper sample manipulation.

elektron.se



Korg Electribe Sampler

£310

Korg's similarly-priced sampler beats Model:Samples on track count and sample shaping, but lacks the deeper sequencing tools.

korg.com



Roland TR-8S

£530

Roland's latest TR drum machine can load user samples alongside its modeled drum sounds and offers surprisingly deep shaping and sequencing capabilities.

roland.com

than it is, although the build quality feels robust and solid nonetheless.

While the look might be different, functionally Model:Samples shares a lot of traits with Elektron's mid-level sampler, Digitakt. Broadly speaking, the two are effectively the same instrument, albeit with a drastically stripped-back feature set here, with fewer tracks, no onboard sampling and fewer sample editing options.

What's left are six identical tracks, each of which can function as an audio track for sample playback or MIDI track for controlling external gear. In audio mode, samples are loaded from the browser and can then be shaped using the Pitch, Decay, Sample Start and Sample Length rotaries. These relatively simple controls are a noticeable step down from the multistage amp envelopes of Digitakt, but still provide plenty of scope for creativity. There are buttons to engage sample loop and reverse modes too. Combined with the ability to modulate and automate all these parameters, it becomes possible to do

a lot of creative things from a single sound source – reversing samples on one step, looping the sound on another, with pitch variations throughout, for example.

Each audio track can also make use of a resonant, bi-directional filter and synced multi-shape LFO. The filter has both cutoff and resonance knobs on the front panel, both of which – as with all front panel rotaries – can be automated or modulated via the sequencer or LFO. The cutoff is bi-directional, allowing the filter to act as either a low- or high-pass depending on whether cutoff is set in positive or negative values. The LFO, meanwhile, controls for both speed

and rate multiplier, meaning that, although it's permanently synced to the master tempo, there's a huge variety of speeds on offer, from ultra-slow to audio rate. There are seven LFO wave types too, including a random mode and a one-shot envelope type – the latter of which makes up for the lack of a dedicated filter envelope. Assigning LFO destinations can be done in the LFO menu, or by simply holding the LFO button and turning any of the rotaries.

Each track also has a volume control that can be pushed into distortion for extra grit. The final sound-shaping element comes from a pair of global auxiliary effects – reverb

“Far more streamlined... but with enough complexity to bring something new”

USB CAPABILITIES

While it doesn't support Elektron's Overbridge software, Model:Samples can function like an audio interface in order to stream its stereo output tracks directly into your DAW via USB. There's a weird lack of information provided about this though. While the instrument is referred to as 'class compliant' on Elektron's site, and there are allusions to sending/receiving audio in the settings section of the manual, nowhere does it explicitly explain what the audio-over-USB capabilities are and how to take advantage of them. Given that Model:Samples is designed for the entry/intermediate level of the

market, this lack of clarity is a baffling own goal on Elektron's part.

The USB connection can also be used to import user samples into the instrument. This is done via Elektron's simple but effective Transfer application for Mac or Windows. This lets users import sounds – as mono 16 bit, 48 kHz files – to make use of the 1GB onboard memory. It also makes a handy librarian for reordering and organising sounds.



and delay – each of which can be tailored via its own front panel rotary.

Where Model:Samples really shines, however, is in its sequencing workflow. Each track can be programmed or live recorded into a pattern of up to 64 steps, and sequence length and speed can be set individually for each track to easily achieve polyrhythmic results. Model:Samples also makes use of Elektron's Parameter Lock system, allowing parameter automation to be assigned to each sequencer step. The Sample Lock capability takes this further still by letting users change the source sample for each step in the sequencer. This drastically expands the capabilities of the instrument's six channels, allowing multiple sounds to be programmed on any one audio track.

Model:Samples also inherits Digitakt's fantastic Conditional Locks feature. This lets users configure whether individual sequencer steps fire off, based on conditions such as probability, whether Fill mode is engaged or how many times a sequence has played. It's a really excellent tool for adding extra variation and unpredictability to your patterns. Other sequence-refining tools come across from Elektron's higher end gear too, such as the ability to nudge triggers off the grid, assign quick rolls to individual steps, and edit a parameter across all tracks at once with the Control All mode.

It's these sequencing tools that bring the Model:Samples to life. You can argue that, for the price, Model:Samples' core sample engine is a little simplistic – with no direct sampling, no timestretching, fairly basic envelope shaping – but the creativity offered by the sequencer makes up for any sound-shaping limitations. What's more, Elektron have mostly done a stellar job of keeping the workflow simple, with little in the way of menu-diving and a pleasingly shallow learning curve.

The one misstep here comes from the browser. As with other Elektron Samplers, Model:Samples uses the brand's '+Drive' system whereby the onboard memory is divided up into multiple Projects, each of which can contain up to 96 Patterns and 576 Samples. The Projects level feels a little like an unnecessary layer of complexity in an instrument designed for immediacy; a simple system of Samples and Patterns would work



PADS: The six sample triggers are velocity sensitive, allowing for nuanced playing and recording

CONTROL ALL: Edit a parameter across all tracks simultaneously. The Reload function can quickly undo/recall any changes

ROTARIES: The front panel gives hands-on access to all of the major parameters. Each of these can be automated too

CHANCE: Conditional Triggers get a dedicated control here, making it easy to dial in variety

just as well. Assigning sounds to tracks can be a little unwieldy too. The factory sound library is organised into Kits, which allows full six sound instruments to be loaded at once, but without a tagging system there's no easy way to audition multiple sounds of the same type. If you want to try out a variety of kicks, for example, you'll need to navigate in and out of the sub folders for each individual kit.

The factory sounds themselves are high quality throughout though. While they lean towards house and techno, there is a decent amount of variety on the whole and producers of any genre will find plenty to get their teeth into.

On the whole then, Model:Samples is a welcome departure for Elektron. It's a far more streamlined instrument than the rest of their range but still has enough complexity carried down from those

higher-end instruments to bring something new. Conditional Locks and the extensive parameter automation feel genuinely fresh at this price, even if the sample engine itself doesn't offer much to set itself apart from similarly-priced rivals.

For my money, the biggest competition Model:Samples faces comes from Elektron's own Digitakt sampler. Digitakt is currently selling in the UK for around £600 – roughly £200 more than Model:Samples. While this is obviously a significant step up, given the additional tracks, built-in sampling workflow and Overbridge DAW integration, I'd be inclined to hold out and try and scrape together for the extra outlay. While Model:Samples is undoubtedly more accessible, the flip side of this is that intermediate producers are likely to meet limitations.

That simplicity may be Model:Samples' biggest selling point though. Live performers will love having so much control from the front panel, and those seeking hands-on creativity at a good price will find a lot to like here. **FM**

FM VERDICT

8.2

Model:Samples is immediate and affordable, but still retains much of Elektron's deep and creative sequencing tools