

TC Electronic M300

Not since the early days of its guitar effects pedals could you buy equipment with the tc name on it for so little. Repackaging proven technology in an accessible and immediate manner is what the M300 is all about.

ZENON SCHOEPE



One of the peculiar consequences of technology's advance is that eventually it comes full circle. It starts with an over complicated re-interpretation of what it aims to replace and then an evolutionary process begins and continues to the point where the power becomes unquestionable, and the interface is refined until it becomes simple. Eventually the technology is repackaged and piped down to the bottom end of the market and looks, for all intents and purposes, very like the original thing that it replaced.

So it is with the M300, which reminds me so much of some of the early incarnations of the digital effects processor with its line of controls. The difference is that the M300 is the cheapest box that you can buy with the Danish brand on it and those early digital units required non-trivial financial funding. Another observation is that some of those early boxes have now achieved a degree of neo-classic status and the M300 will probably be dismissed by some simply because it is too cheap, despite the fact that it will match and exceed them on pretty much every front.

Other manufacturers have also applied this rebirth of simple control on effects at the affordable end and they've been met with a mixed response. However, project recordists have never had it so good.

What we have here is a very shallow and rather rudimentary looking stereo unit that boasts two of what tc calls engines. These provide a block of reverb and a block of multieffects. A rear panel switch allows you to feed the output of the multieffects in to the reverb, in a serial arrangement, or to parallel the processors independently. For me, the latter is the only way to work but others will disagree.

The rear panel also has balanced jack I-Os, a footswitch input for setting tempo remotely, MIDI ports, and the incredible inclusion, at this price, of SPDIF I-O on phonos as standard. The digital input is selected on a front panel switch, which illuminates an LED. This can run at 48kHz although the analogue inputs operate at 44.1kHz.

You won't need the manual for this device as all that it has is all there in front of you. Tricolour LEDs follow digital and analogue inputs, there's an input level control, plus pots for dry/wet and multieffect/reverb balance. Multieffect and reverb

sections both get 16-position switches that select the relevant effect type and include an Off position for bypassing the section completely. These work in addition to a global bypass switch in the input section. The switches are complemented in the multieffects block by two pots and by three pots in the reverb block. The pots control different effects parameters depending on the selected effect type.

For reverb, the three pots account for pre-delay, decay and colour (read tone). On the multieffects, the two pots control speed and depth on the chorus/flange settings, amount and frequency on the de-esser, and drive and ratio on the compressor. A handful of delay types allow tempo to be tapped in on a button and then multiplied on one pot with feedback controlled on the other. The two aforementioned dynamics effect types activate three gain reduction LEDs.

The M300 is meant to be a bit of an all-rounder and it gets close. The compressor is least impressive although the de-esser is fair. The real strength lies in the fact that there are two separate sections to play with. Modulation effects are excellent and the delay time setting is child's play. I found the ability to vary the wet and dry mix and the mix between the output of the 'engines' to be surprisingly useful. The M300 is acceptably quiet and confidently resilient to spiky dynamic inputs.

I'd say that the reverbs are way above the quality that you would normally expect at this sort of money. There are some good spaces here, and, while I'd suggest that some have too broad a range of pre-delay value to be useful, on the whole you could fool someone in to thinking that you're running a far grander box than it is.

By far and away the most complicated aspect of the M300 is its take on presets. You can store 100 user presets, which you access via up/down keys and a prod of a Load key or via MIDI. You store settings by holding the Load button for a little longer. While playing with presets a row of tiny LEDs will appear in the tiny display above the preset number. While the manual doesn't do a very good job of explaining it, these are effectively nulling LEDs for recalling the front panel control pot positions.

On such an instantaneous little box this errs on the side of overkill. The accuracy of the pot/nulling LED

relationship is a tad ragged. The nulling LED extinguishes as you pass through the preset point and requires repeated reloading of the preset to fine tune the pot position. By this time you could have done it by ear. If nulling was deemed so important it would have been far better to reverse the logic and have the LEDs light at the null point.

However, it's a hard box to fault for the money. I'd be a little distressed if this was the only effects box I had but I would consider it a cheap, cheerful and pretty damn good adjunct to an effects arsenal. Its overall reverb quality is not absolutely stunning but proved to be perfectly acceptable on low profile mix sounds. I have no doubt that project recordists will love it. If you want to fill some rack space with useful and affordable gear then you should explore it. ■

PROS

Simple to use; digital I-O; a fair all-rounder; sounds much more expensive than it is.

CONS

Hard to pick fault at the price but the preset pot controller/nulling LED arrangement is a chore

EXTRAS

The M300's effects types are broad and effective.

Multieffects: dynamic delay; studio delay; tap delay; delay; ping pong; slapback; vintage phaser; phaser; de-esser; compressor; chorus; flanger 1; flanger 2; soft tremolo; hard tremolo.

Reverb: concert hall; living room; club; plate 1; plate 2; spring; live reverb; ambience; classic hall; vocal studio; vocal room; vocal hall; drum box; drum room; large cathedral.

Contact

TC ELECTRONIC, DENMARK:
UK, Tel: 0800 917 8926
Website: www.tcelectronic.com