

SPECIAL FX



AWARD QUAD-FX EFFECTS LOOP EXPANDER

This new problem solver from Award Design has so many uses, we can't even begin to list them.
DEREK JOHNSON goes loopy over the multi-talented Quad-FX.

AWARD QUAD-FX									
PROS									
• Extremely versatile.									
• Low noise, low distortion circuitry.									
CONS									
• External power supply.									
• Input not available on front panel.									
PERFORMANCE									
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
VALUE FOR MONEY									
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

Let's say you've got a cassette multitracker: it's a brilliant device, but there is only one effects send, and you want to use more than one effects unit. Let's also say you're a guitarist, who owns several effects, pedal and rack-mounting, and you're fed up of the noise that accumulates when you chain them together. Let's further postulate that you're a keyboard player with three or four synths and/or modules with stereo outputs — you don't demand much of a mixer since all processing and panning takes place within the synths. Three problems, one solution: Award Designs' new Quad-FX effects loop expander.

This cunning device was initially aimed at guitarists looking for solutions to problem two, amongst others. It has a high impedance input capable of handling a variety of sources — including the low level effects loop in a vintage valve combo or the direct output of a guitar or bass — followed by four effects send/return loops. Each loop has a mono send and stereo return, and each return has a level control. Additionally, there is a combined effect level control, a dry signal level control and an overall master volume control. Amongst the 17 connectors at the rear are outputs for stereo effects only, as well as the master mix.

Split Personality

The versatility of the Quad-FX becomes apparent when you think about putting it into different situations.

RECORDING: Many budget mixers, as well as cassette multitrackers, feature a single aux send, and many recordists would like to use more than one or two processors. The only way to use all your processors at once is to chain them one after another. This can be restrictive, and can result in noise accumulation — the noise from the first unit in the chain is amplified and added to the noise from the next unit and so on. With the Award effects expander, you can use up to four processors in parallel, with independent control over the mix of the processors' returns — patch your aux send's output to the Quad FX's input, and your four effects units into its four effects send/return loops. Remember, though, that the Quad FX does not give you four totally independent aux sends, since all the unit's sends are driven by the single auxiliary on your desk or multitracker. Individual send pots aren't provided, but apart from the lack of panel space, it's no problem setting the input gain at the processor, balancing the effect level with the return trims.

LINE MIXING: The circuitry of the Quad-FX accepts a wide range of levels and adds little to the signal by way of noise and distortion — the ideal line mixer, useful as

emergency inputs in the studio or for sub-mixing keyboards.

LEVEL MATCHING AND DI: The Quad-FX's input level tolerance means that it can function as a level matcher and even a DI box, since guitars or basses can be input directly.

GUITAR FX SETUPS: Guitarists could split their signal to feed four amps or four separate effects chains at once (use a MIDI-controlled pedal board to select which chain is active). Used in the way originally intended, the Quad-FX gives guitarists access to up to four effects at once without having to chain them. The reductions in noise are further enhanced by the low noise circuitry used by Award Designs. The build quality of this circuitry is superb; in fact, the dual ganged pots that are used on the effects returns are hand assembled with tracks balanced within 2dB of each other, so when you adjust the level of the return, there won't be any left/right imbalance; they match right down to silence.

Nit-Picking

I did have a few niggles; for me, the design is a little on the 'square' (as in L7) side, but the box is sturdy — apart from a tendency for the lid to buckle at the front when pressed. I am also no great fan of external power supplies; other minor PSU problems are that the mains end terminates in a two-pronged plug and that it provides 18-0-18V. If you should lose or break it, that spare £5, multi-voltage PSU from Argos will definitely not tide you over. On the connector front, it would have been nice to have a duplicate input on the front panel (useful when the Quad-FX is mounted in a gig rack), and a headphone socket.

Final Words

Well, I think that's enough negative vibes. At £225, Quad-FX is priced quite attractively, and if it has what you want it hasn't got much in the way of competition. A unit that can behave as an effects loop expander, signal splitter, line mixer, level matcher, DI box, and more at this price has to be worth a look — you don't know it yet, but you probably need one! To make it easier, we've negotiated a special offer for readers of RM: buy one from Award during May, and it will cost just £199. Can't say fairer than that. ☘

FURTHER INFORMATION

- E** Quad-FX £225 including VAT; £199 to RM readers in May.
- A** Award Design, PO Box 3, Basingstoke, RG24 9QA.
- T** 0256 477222.
- F** 0256 817687.

► only the supplied adaptor will do the job.

That's it for the back, which is surprising really, considering what the Quad-FX is capable of doing.

The front panel is where the mixing action is, starting with the input control pot on the left. This features plus or minus adjustment from the unity gain (straight signal level) point, with a peak indicator and a sensitivity button to increase the signal coming into the Quad-FX from low level processors or instruments.

Next come the four effects return trim pots, again with plus or minus from the unity gain point, and these are used to fine-mix the level of the effects returning to the Quad-FX's four stereo loops. Return pair No.4 can be switched to mono via a push-button alongside its return trim pot.

Master level controls for the effects signal and dry signal allow overall mixing and balancing of the two, after the individual levels have been established. There's also a phase inversion switch for correcting old processors, which might have problems with their input and output phasing, although I'd admit this is a very rare case.

Finally, there's a master volume pot with its own unity gain point and a peak level indicator to ensure the output signal is below distortion point. The mains switch and LED add the finishing touches.

IN USE

One of the things claimed for the Quad-FX is its ability to take an amp's effects loop — one which won't line up with effects units — and correct the levels so it will. By chance there happened to be a 12 year-old MkII Boogie combo in the *Guitarist* studio with just such a loop. So the Quad-FX was duly hooked up.

I decided to go overboard with processors and connected three digital multi-effects units and a mono delay.

The first problem was to work out the correct overall send and return levels, but with the Quad-FX's input and master volume set on unity gain I found the



processors worked at roughly the same settings anyway, so there wasn't much need to tweak the levels. It was more important to set the processors' internal patch levels so that when switching between processors the levels still matched. This done, I set each processor to a different effect and balanced the quantity of each effect coming into the Quad-FX with the four trim pots.

I have to say the results were incredibly heartening, and after a minimal amount of extra tweaking with the Quad-FX's master controls the Boogie was powering all the effects individually, with no extra noise and no unwanted distortion at all. I then switched all the processors on at once, each with a different patch to produce a compressed, pitch shifted sound with reverb and a really big delay... and it all worked!

Switching between the different combinations of effects and processors produced the same results, and apart from inventing some really stupid effect chains I found plenty of interesting combinations; these could be mixed with the dry signal without losing any of the basic guitar sound. Of course, switching between the digital processors has to be done via a MIDI foot-controller, so if analogue effects are to be used as well, that could mean booking some tap dancing lessons! The bottom line is, however, that an amp with an effects loop which couldn't be used properly before, not only handles one processor

but can feed four with no trouble at all and with no signal corruption.

CONCLUSION

Quite how useful a device like the Quad-FX can be isn't really obvious until you try one out. It's certainly the way to mix effects, help an inefficient effects loop and even expand a basic recording setup. But there's even more to it than I've already told you.

Connect it up to your hi-fi and you can plug in your guitar preamp without running the risk of blowing your speakers while you play along to your tape, CD, record player — or all three simultaneously if you like! For such a simple device the list of possible uses is vast, and although the Quad-FX isn't the only device of this type on the market, it's certainly one of the best. And it's British! ■

SPEC CHECK

Price:	£225.00
Height:	1U
Width:	19"
Depth:	4 1/4"
Casing:	metal
Power:	AC adaptor (supplied)

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