

# Mackie Control & Baby HUI

Brad Watts has controllers circling in a holding pattern over his studio. The Control and 'Son of' HUI are cleared for landing.

Towards the beginning of this year I was quite blown away by the joint effort between Mackie and Emagic – namely the Logic Control. Unfortunately, at the time, the unit was still in beta development but there was not a great deal missing from the full implementation. Since that time Logic Control has become quite a successful controller – nothing comes close to offering the same complement of control tools for the price. Of course the question at the time was would Logic Control function with software packages other than Logic? The answer was a rather defensive, 'no'. The software and

hardware are welded together via proprietary chips.

Obviously after



Emagic

have had a nine-month run with 'their' control surface, Mackie has decided it's their turn to put some runs on the board. The Logic Control surface has resurfaced as a controller for everybody. It's been re-tweaked to function with a multitude of recording packages including Steinberg's Nuendo and Cubase SX, MOTU's Digital Performer and both Mackie's Sounscape 32 and Mixtreme – Sonar2 from Cakewalk and Syntrillium's CoolEdit Pro are slated for support soon. The only big player missing is Digidesign, who of course has its own proprietary control surfaces. Still, you're looking at a pretty large slice of the DAW software market and as a consequence this incarnation of Mackie's controller could become the defacto budget controller for everyone.

The Mackie Control is the same box as the Emagic version but this unit will not function with Logic. They are physically the same, barring some changes to the top panel legending – in fact, the surface comes with adhesive overlays to reflect the different button assignments of the separate DAWs it supports. The real changes are internal.

At the time of receiving the controller, Digital Performer was the only compatible Mac software – v3.1 of DP is a free upgrade and has integrated Mackie Control functionality. This controller features nine Penny & Giles touch-sensitive and motorised faders – the ninth being a dedicated master fader. Should you need more fader action there's the Mackie Control XT – an extra

eight faders that you can add according to how many Midi buses you have. These faders offer 10-bit resolution (which translates as 1,024 steps). Each of the eight channel faders feature mute, solo, select and record arm buttons. Each has their own push-button V-Pot – the V-Pot is a Mackie patent and first appeared on the original HUI control surface for ProTools. Above the master fader are bank-switching buttons for scrolling through banks in blocks of eight faders or to scroll fader selection incrementally. A Flip button will alternate the V-Pot functions to the fader so that pan, plug-in or send data can be controlled via the faders. Visual feedback as to a fader or pots setting is available via the backlit LCD screen.

Like all control surfaces, the transport and navigation sections reside to the right of the unit. A transport section with 'large and loud' buttons sits above the Zoom controls and a D8B-style jog/shuttle/scrub wheel. Above the transport are 39 push-buttons that change duties according to the connected software (these are the buttons the software-specific overlays cover). There are enough buttons here to access even really quite specific/obscure functions. To avoid jumping back to the computer's keyboard there are modifier buttons such as Command, Control and Shift. The Digital Performer setup featured a 'Save' button and 'Slave to Ext Sync' along with Enter and Escape buttons. DP users will be well pleased with how little they'll need to address their Qwerty keyboard. Both the Cubase and Performer setups access automation controls and markers along with ancillary transport functions such as Cycle and Punch In and Out. The Digital Performer layout has the rather nice ability to pull up the Sequence Editor, Track Overview and Mixer windows from the controller – very ProTools.

As for the build quality of these units (the Emagic version included), I don't think it's quite up to Mackie's usual military-grade standard – for example, the Mackie Control weighs much the same as the tiny Baby HUI – and it's one of the few Mackie products I've seen utilising lots of plastic. Yes, yes, I know there are manufacturing budgets to meet but it remains to be seen how these units fare after a few years of constant prodding and hands rubbing over them. On the performance front, the Control is very good indeed. For the money spent you get a great control surface with the avenue of continued upgrading via the host software. For Cubase and Nuendo users I'd warrant that it's a better choice than Steinberg's Houston and for many of the other software packages, it's the only real choice.

## Baby HUI

A baby HUI, sorry, 'The Baby HUI'. Cigars all round! Son

of HUI is here! I remember interviewing the father of this toddler back in early 1998 and in certain departments found him just a little under-qualified for the position. The original Mr. HUI was, at the time, a marvel of modern SysEx implementation. Digidesign was probably asking a little too much of the poor chap – expecting signal routing, software operation and mixing surface duties all via system exclusive. Of course, HUI would only work with ProTools, but at that stage control surfaces were strictly the bastion of the well heeled. Bear in mind that HUI was the first control surface available for ProTools and it was the first time the Mackie crew had worked so closely with a DAW manufacturer. My, how times have changed.

The technology employed in the first HUI has spread to other co-operative efforts with Mackie. What has evolved from these alliances is the 'HUI Midi Mapping Protocol', a mapping standard that DAW manufacturers can quickly integrate into their software. Baby HUI adheres to this standard and can therefore function with a variety of audio platforms. At the moment, support for the Baby comes from Digidesign of course – both TDM and 001 systems, MOTU's Digital Performer, Steinberg's Nuendo and Mackie's recently acquired Soundscape 32 and Mixtreme.

The need for such a controller is obvious. Motorised faders with touch sensitivity are the 'grail' of automated mixing. Why you'd want the Baby HUI as your controller would come down to either price or its relatively tiny footprint. At about \$1,900 it's a bulletproof controller with the track record of its ancestor. Or the 370 x 260mm surface area could be what turns you on to the Baby HUI. This small size could make it a perfect component of a laptop/MBox system – I'm already picturing a rather swish Mbox, TiBook and Baby HUI road case.

Unlike the old school HUI, no audio passes through this baby – it's strictly a controller. Build quality is of the Mackie standard one expects from this prolific manufacturer – plate metal casing for the entire box and buttons that give a reassuring click, both audibly and physically. Each channel strip features mute and solo buttons and a rotary encoder that also offers press-button functionality for channel selection and automation arming. Pressing the rotary encoder in combination with the shift button will arm the appropriate channel to record. Below the encoder is a LED to let you know the channel is selected and whether there is signal present on that path. Here's a crunch point that may steer potential buyers to a more upmarket controller. While the faders are motorised and touch sensitive, they are a meagre 60mm in travel. Some may say 60mm is fine; others would refuse to use them. I prefer the longer travel but I did find these faders quite acceptable. It's not like comparing the analogue equivalents as you are, after all, simply controlling software. My second niggle is to do with the absence of a master fader – there are but eight faders in total. Sure you can skip to the next bank to get to the software's master fader but I'd much prefer a big rude master control fader – the one you immediately jump on when a signal path goes inexplicably wrong. In my book it's an example of software



overriding hardware – and no doubt comes down to keeping the cost of the unit down. Regardless of what you prefer, these faders have a smooth feel that's uniform across the set. They're quiet and definitely fulfil the required intention.

The master section is relatively simple. Transport controls are closely flanked by the Bank Select buttons – a chunky LED reflects the current bank. Above the transport are dedicated mixer and edit window buttons. These pull up the connected software's windows immediately. Read, Write, Touch and Bypass buttons for automation are present, thankfully, as is an Undo button. The final top row of buttons select pan or send assignments for the rotary encoders.

The back panel is super simple. Power is supplied via a universal power supply that accepts standard IEC mains cables. You'll find Midi in and out ports and an on/off switch. As with most controllers that employ Midi as their data path, both in and out must be connected, preferably to a dedicated Midi port. Don't go trying to daisy chain the Baby into a Midi system as the unit will just get confused – you must have a multi port Midi interface. Of course, the first program I ran the little HUI with was ProTools. Any version from 4.1 and up will function and that includes ProTools LE, of course. Baby HUI shares the same controller personality file as the original HUI. Choose the controller file and the port it's connected to and the faders spring to life – couldn't be easier. Being a Macintosh kinda guy I gave the Baby a run with Digital Performer 3.1 as well – everything worked flawlessly and it was quite refreshing to see what a great program Performer is – very professional. So, in a nutshell, the Baby HUI is a great little controller if you're strapped for cash or physical space. The only functional point to consider is if you can live with the 60mm faders.



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#### **Price**

• Mackie Control: \$2,995; Baby HUI: \$1,895