



Manipulate EQ with effects module No Equal



Embedded GuitarPort software gives you access to all your favourite tones

# Line 6 RiffTracker £169



Line 6's GuitarPort has grown its own recording studio. We investigate RiffTracker... by Benji Bartlett

## The rivals

Cakewalk Guitar Tracks Pro 3 £99

As you might have guessed from our somewhat under-populated rivals list, there isn't a lot of choice in the guitarist-specific recording software market. Cakewalk Guitar Tracks Pro 3 offers 32 audio tracks and has Amplitude LE modelling software embedded in the package for all your guitar tones. The effects processing and editing tools are more on a par with popular sequencers like Cubase and Pro Tools, and you can apply 32 simultaneous effects in real-time, non-destructively. Other features include: Audio loop construction tools, full support for ACID format files, library of ACID loops, Support for DirectX and VST effects (VST support through included Cakewalk VST Adaptor), Import/Export wav, mp3 and wma files, and an integrated tuner and metronome

Imagine jamming with a drummer who never gets tired, doesn't smell of old socks and who can invent new rhythms on the fly without dropping a beat. Sounds like fun, doesn't it? Then imagine a ridiculously simple user interface for recording your jams, riffs and solos in real time with the aforementioned groovy skin-basher. What you've just imagined is the new GuitarPort RiffTracker from Line 6 – well, the basic functions at least – because like all Line 6 gear, there's always more going on under the hood when you're ready to explore deeper.

This brand new Line 6 package contains the familiar 'autobot's head'-shaped GuitarPort USB interface with the large rotary volume control and jack input for your guitar, and comes with both GuitarPort Version 2.5 amp and effects modelling and RiffWorks software on a single CR-ROM. The concept of RiffTracker is to make the process of recording your ideas so effortless that you can keep your guitar in your hands all the time, focusing your attention on your playing and improvisation rather than getting distracted by fiddling around for hours with faders, knobs and buttons.

If you're about to make the leap into hard-disk recording but are discouraged by technical jargon and the complexity of sequencing software, then this product might just be the easiest and fastest route to making CDs of your own music. Installing



RiffTracker's quad-knobbed Instant Drummer

RiffTracker on your PC (it's not available for Mac, unfortunately) is a piece of cake, provided you take heed of the warning not to connect the GuitarPort USB hardware until prompted. If you already have older GuitarPort software installed on your PC, you may need to save your downloaded song tracks and uninstall the application first before attempting to load on the RiffTracker software as the disc also includes a full copy of latest GuitarPort Version 2.5.

Once you're installed, recording with the RiffWorks application is as satisfying and simple as making a tasty sandwich. First you set the overall mood or culinary region by choosing a drum loop from the InstantDrummer groove section at the bottom of the page. The InstantDrummer is one of four backing options in RiffWorks from a choice of Metronome, InstantDrummer, Rex Player and Rewire. The Metronome offers three different sounds for basic timekeeping

LINE 6 RIFFTRACKER	TEST RESULTS
Features	★★★★☆
Usability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★☆
Value for money	★★★★★

- **WE LIKED** An absolute doddle to use; improves your timing and improvising skills, with great sounding results; fantastic tutorial videos included
- **WE DISLIKED** There is nothing to complain about here

and the Rex Player allows you to import Rex file drum and audio loops from other audio software for more involved backing applications. The Rewire mode allows you to hook up RiffWorks to run simultaneously with other audio software for maximum versatility. This way you can load in existing parts or patterns from compatible software as your backing loops.

For now, though, we'll get back to InstantDrummer. Just four control knobs labelled intensity, variation, ambience and gain take care of all of the drumming action. There are plenty of styles to choose from to get you started, with more patterns available from the Line 6 website. Once the electronic tub-thumper is set in motion, the random nature of the variation control makes it feel like jamming with a real live drummer rather than with a piece of machinery.

So now we've decided on the bread, as it were, we can choose our fillings. This is the fun part. The RiffRecorder section takes up the largest area of the RiffWorks screen and contains a big empty counter – a bit like the one in Subway an hour before it opens – only instead of it then being stocked with salad and cold cuts, you simply stock it

**The RiffTracker is unique among software packages in the way it allows you to control the start functions and tempo of recordings with your guitar right there in your hand**



GuitarPort's 'autobot'-shaped hardware unit for the RiffTracker

with the riffs and musical ideas that you create for yourself.

Recording a riff is simple. First, get your guitar tone dialled in by clicking on the GuitarPort button. This brings the embedded software up to the front and allows you to select a cool preset or craft your own tone from the 16 amp models and eight available effects on offer. Now, using your guitar to set the tempo and arm the recorder for action, set up a two-bar lead count-in and the InstantDrummer will start playing when you do, and rock exactly in time, while RiffWorks continually records your takes over the drum loop. It stacks each 'take' in the Riff Recorder virtual rack, neatly numbered for your reference. When you record a take that you're particularly happy with, you can opt to keep it and discard any unwanted takes. A handy auto-mute function while recording means that you won't be distracted by previous takes as you go, allowing you to concentrate on getting right on the groove for your best performance.

A riff can be made up of as few or as many takes or layers as you like, and

can have effects added after recording from an available list of: filter, shaper, modulator, delay, reverb, compressor and equaliser. Once you've completed a riff, it will appear in the colour-coded RiffList collection. It's a good idea to name your riff at this stage so that you can clearly see what part it is. Calling riffs intro, verse one or chorus two will make life easier when you get to compiling your riffs into a song later.

Above the RiffRecorder lies the song bar, which is basically a riff playlist. By dragging riffs on to the song bar timeline, you can quickly and easily construct an entire song out of the wholesome musical ingredients you've created and then mix it down to wav or ogg file formats before burning on CD.

### Verdict

The RiffTracker is unique among recording software packages in the way that it allows you to control the start functions and tempo of recordings with your guitar right there in your hand. Unless you've spent any time trying to record in a PC-based studio by yourself, you might not realise just how


**RiffWorks is a powerful and capable recording package that gives impressive-sounding results fast without any mouse-clicking gymnastics**



Another effects block, a phaser called The Tempest, lets you rock up a storm...

liberating this feature is. We can't praise RiffWorks highly enough for putting the emphasis on playing and jamming instead of audio engineering.

Despite its simplicity, we mustn't forget that the RiffWorks is a powerful recording package that gives impressive results fast without any of the mouse-clicking gymnastics of most sequencing packages. The package is not aspiring to be a multitrack recorder with the versatility of, say, Cakewalk Guitar Tracks, nor does it require any prior knowledge of recording terminology or studio techniques.

Like all the best technological advances, the user interface is the key factor and it's in this area that Line 6 has excelled again. If you like to jam and invent on the fly then the RiffWorks application is an extraordinarily powerful compositional recording tool, and because GuitarPort is embedded within the program, you'll never be left wanting for the right tone. Once the playing and recording is done, Line 6 has made the process of saving and burning your masterpiece to CD completely foolproof. There's no reason why you can't create full songs with vocals, bass lines and keyboard parts. It's a refreshingly musical recording experience that puts you in control, with healthy side-effects of improving your timing, creativity and improv skills. In short, the Line 6 RiffTracker is a blissfully easy-to-use jamming and recording package that any guitar player will benefit from owning. 

### LINE 6 RIFFTRACKER

**PRICE:** £169

**ORIGIN:** USA

**TYPE:** PC-only, guitarist-friendly, simple recording software with drums

**FEATURES:** GuitarPort USB Hardware, GuitarPort Software Amp modeller, effects modeller, electronic tuner. Fully compatible with GuitarPort and PODxt. Guitar-optimised recording. Guitar activated tempo setting. Guitar-activated recording. Fast song construction, mixdown to wav and ogg file formats. 16 amp models

### SYSTEM

**REQUIREMENTS:** Intel Pentium III@ class 1 GHz (P4 or equivalent 1.8 GHz or faster recommended), AGP video card with 800x600 with minimum 16-bit graphics 16-bit graphics, 384MB RAM minimum (512MB recommended), 1GB free required (2GB free recommended), One available USB port, or a powered USB hub. Live internet connection is required for installation but not to use the application once it has been installed

**EFFECTS:** Up to eight GuitarPort effects simultaneously: gate, wah, distortion/fuzz, compression, cabinet, delay, volume, modulation and reverb and eight RiffWorks effects: filter, shaper, modulator, delay, reverb, compressor and equaliser

**CONNECTIONS:** USB GuitarPort hardware features volume control and jack input

**OPTIONS:** GuitarPort version 2.5 (£110)

**Line 6 UK**

**01327 302713**

**www.line6.co.uk**



The metronome controls allow simple time-keeping and bpm changes



Create a stack of loops and build a riff that can be dragged into the song window

### Line 6 RiffTracker

Guitarist RATING

