

# Field Report

## Tascam MP-GT1 Portable Memory Guitar Trainer

**A**udio-learning devices suffer from a crucial flaw: every student it has been my privilege to work with at a clinic or summer school has had a wheel come off their technique several bars before the actual crash. An audio device only gives the sound of the crash; teacher and student need to be together to see where and why the wheel nuts come loose. MP3 devices are arriving in all kinds of gear now, more will arrive as we go along, and clearly there are ways to use them to our advantage.

The Tascam MP-GT1 is here now and, given the caveats, is a very useful gadget indeed to a student at any level. It's a Walkman/iPodesque unit that contains a metronome, a simple chromatic tuner, an ability to store and play just under 1 gigabyte of MP3s, and a collection of simple preset effects that have enough uncoloured settings to be useful to the plugged-in fingerstylist or flatpicker. It has a quarter-inch mono jack input, and a stereo mini jack headphone out. The on/off switch is a slider that must be held to change state (reducing the chance of your turning it on and flattening the battery accidentally), there are controls to balance the audio between MP3/ metronome and guitar, for overall output volume, and for input sensitivity – the latter very useful for fingerpickers because a wide range of output levels come from piezo and soundhole pickups. All else is accessed via standard push-buttons and a rotary selector.

MP3s are loaded on and off the Tascam via USB, using no proprietary software. It would prefer USB2, but works fine with my USB1. It mounts/ ejects on from PC or Mac as a drive, within which are folders for system and music. Drag and drop an existing MP3 to the music folder, and you're done. Once disconnected, the MP3 files show up in the MP-GT1's LCD display. Right away I can see how a teacher's accompaniment track or duet part can help at home – playback pitch and speed can be varied, and we're told how to do this in a thorough manual that comes as a PDF loaded at manufacture.

Power is supplied by a proprietary lithium-ion battery and, like other iPod owners, I sucked in my breath at this point. Tascam, when tackled about battery issues, responded with no prevarication. The battery itself is user-replaceable; instructions are given in the manual. I had it apart and

back together with no problems beyond lining up the slider switch claw with the internal toggle at reassembly and, predictably, packing away the battery cable in the neatly fitting cavity, both of which require about as much care as threading a darning needle. I quote Tascam's Gary Maguire, responding to my battery-performance query by email:

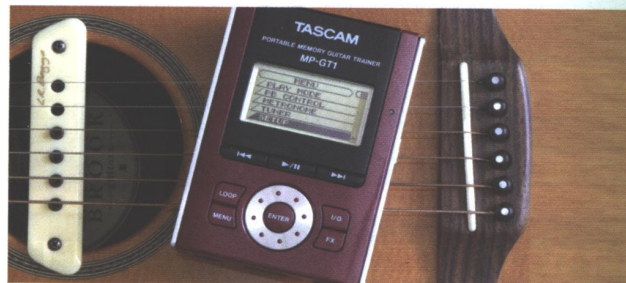
"The MP-GT1 can be charged up to 300–500 times before it loses its full charge. It will be able to hold approximately 70% of its full power after this amount of charges. This basically means it will last for approximately five hours before running out. I would expect the battery to have an overall lifespan of about 1000–2000 charges before it becomes completely unusable. On first signs of low charge we would recommend upgrading the battery. If you were using the unit on a daily basis for, say, five hours this would mean you would get approximately two years out of an installed battery."

It is computer dependent as far as loading or unloading is concerned, and will take charge from the USB port. However, it can be charged with a mains adaptor, and as always with lithium-ion batteries' fussiness about charge rate, Tascam's PSU is specific to this battery.

It may also be used as a jump drive – to carry a PDF score between teacher's and pupil's computers.

Suggested retail is £159. I'd suggest a good look at it.

**Adrian Legg**



## Effectrode Phaseomatic Deluxe

**H**ere's a thing you might not have thought of as relevant to acoustic players, but the Effectrode Phaseomatic Deluxe brings phasing back to reality and viability. No noisily whooshing, wheezing bunch of solid-state components this, but an all-tube signal path that can warm a piezo very nicely indeed, and help soften that edgy transient.

It uses three 12AT7 valves to give four triode phase splitters with a photocell in each section that shift phase 720 degrees. Intensity is switchable via the mini toggle on the top, with further much more extreme tweaking inside for the intrepid. The leftmost rotary control selects wave shape, offering sine, three to eight soft jumps (a beautifully rhythmic setting – the three step is a delight to this incurable waltz fan), rounded square and triangle. Centre control is for speed, from gently breathing to a wild Leslie-like wobble, and the right control governs effect depth. The on/off button takes the signal right out of the unit in true bypass style, but what an acoustic player might note is that set to on, but with depth at a minimum, the unit operates as a 1 megohm input impedance valve buffer to 10 kilohms output with no, or imperceptible, phase movement. Indeed, if you pick a step setting and zero the level control, you can stop the filter moving and use it as a static notch – surprisingly helpful with the honk from a Sunrise or another soundhole pickup, and very interesting indeed with a soundboard transducer.

Despite its all-tube and metal-box construction it's very light, and the total weight, including the multi-voltage, multi-connector mains supply that will keep you functioning anywhere in the world, is 38 ounces.

I tried it with various acoustic pickup systems and found it a charming and very flexible addition to the sound. It warmed a Sunrise and a Baggs M1, softened soundboard transducers and undersaddles, and generally added a breath of spring to overall tonal textures. It can be pushed to extremes with

no problem, but what surprised me was the extent to which phasing, an effect I had previously considered more of a nuisance than anything else, can enhance an acoustic, either solo or ensemble, under voices. As with all moving effects, in an acoustic context the trick is always to err on the side of subtlety – audiences tire of repetition very quickly – and as subtlety is not usually on the menu of a cheaper solid-state phaser, this one opens hitherto rare possibilities, and in my opinion these tubes bring back some of the more natural diffusion that is lost when we plug in.

Check out [www.effectrode.com](http://www.effectrode.com) for UK dealers, or contact maker Phil Taylor via the site for advice on where you might try one.

Effectrode also make an equally wonderful valve-based chorus, and have a tube opto-compressor under development, so this is a site that an acoustic player would do well to keep an eye on. Whether or not you're a Takamine fan, their Cool Tube has demonstrated that tubes can benefit us; tube DI boxes are the biz at the high end, and Effectrode offer us a way of acquiring those benefits and a little colour variety for the live set at the same time.

**£265.00 rrp Adrian Legg**

