



Markbass Super Pro DI Box & Radial Engineering JDV Mk3 Super DI

Mark Beazley road-tests two DI boxes looking to impress the pro player.

For most bass players, the idea of purchasing a DI box is probably not too high on the list of essentials but, if you want confidence over the control of your sound, live or in the studio, they can be a valuable addition to your equipment.

Canadian company Radial Engineering have a reputation for high-end pro audio equipment, endorsed by the likes of Tony Levin, John Patitucci and Victor Wooten, and the JDV Mk3 seeks to further enhance that reputation, offering a comprehensive range of features. Also on test here is the latest addition to Markbass's ever expanding catalogue of bass-specific equipment, the Super Pro DI Box. As we have come to expect from the Italian bass specialists, the Super Pro

DI is a compact, lightweight unit designed with the pro player in mind. Let's see how the two match up.

Markbass Super Pro DI Box

At first glance, and feel, the Super Pro DI looks somewhat unusual with its lightweight and bright-yellow finish. It's a passive DI, so unlike the Radial JDV, doesn't require a power source or on-board battery in order to function.

The straightforward design incorporates two ¼-inch jack inputs, labelled 'input' and 'thru', and a balanced XLR output. Two small click switches either side of the XLR socket correspond to ground lift and output selection.

According to Markbass, the Super Pro DI has been designed

surprised upon setting the input controls on the Apogee at how well the Super Pro DI Box controlled the instrument's output, making it easy to set recording levels and achieve an even bass sound. Turning up the input on the Apogee had no significant impact on noise levels, but due to its passive design, the output from the Super Pro remained quite low, which might be an issue in some recording environments.

Selecting the 'line' output produced equally good results and a noticeably higher output. The unit worked especially well when running through an amp, which in this case was an Eden Time Traveler, with the true sound of the amp coming through.

Using a passive bass, the level of unwanted noise made any recording unusable and we had to increase the input on the Apogee practically to full in order to achieve a good signal level. Using a compressor only seemed to make this worse.

The manual is clear and concise and the overall operation of the unit couldn't be more straightforward, but when it comes to the Super Pro DI Box, the biggest plus point is its ease of use, good tonal balance and its ability to achieve healthy recording levels with reasonably low noise (assuming you're using an active bass, or recording through an amp). If you are looking for a compact, simple-to-use, 'out of the box' DI for recording this would certainly fit the bill.

Radial Engineering JDV Mk3 Super DI

The JDV Mk3 is an active DI built around a 30-volt class-A circuit and comes with a good-quality 42-volt power unit. On first look the unit seems a little daunting,

with active instruments in mind. And so, with a Yamaha BB1100 (fitted with active EMG pickups) plugged into the input socket, and with the output set to 'speaker out', we sent the signal from the XLR to an Apogee Duet audio interface, and set up to record, using Logic Pro 9.

How does it sound?

Despite the Yamaha's high output, we were pleasantly



with its array of multiple inputs, outputs and switches, but there's a satisfying weight to it that gives you confidence even before you plug in.

The JDV has two switchable inputs, a thru output to run a signal to an amp, two auxiliary jack outputs for additional amps or effects, a tuner out and an XLR output for sending a signal to a mixing board. Other notable features include lo- and hi-cut filters, three main output controls (polarity reverse, -15 dB pad and ground lift) and a -30 dB pad allowing you to take a line from the second speaker output of your amp.

In order to compare the two units side by side, we used the JDV in exactly the same way as the Markbass Super Pro DI, as a simple 'in and out' DI. Powering up the JDV lights a corresponding status LED on the front panel. There is also a signal and a clip LED, to let you know when to reduce the input to avoid overload.

How does it sound?

Absolutely amazing. As good – better in fact, as there was less noise than going through the Eden. All the depth of the tone was there, and the harmonics had a bell-like ring to them. We were blown away by the clarity of sound that this unit delivered. There's a complete absence of unwanted noise, and you are left with a very natural and transparent sound. Both the lo- and hi-cut buttons work beautifully and are perfect for cleaning up a muddy bass sound or one that's too brittle. Using the active Yamaha BB1100, we barely had to increase the input on the Apogee interface at all to get a great recording level, with not a hint of hiss, noise or hum. For a bass that is quite tricky to contain, we found this kind of control made everything simple, even eliminating the hum that

the EMGs normally produce when recording in close proximity to monitor speakers.

On plugging in a passive bass, the noise problems I had when trying to get a healthy level using the Super Pro just weren't an issue. With the drag control you can add some warmth to the tone, and raising the level to match the Yamaha didn't produce any noise at all, it just made the bass sound better!

What at first looked like a complicated piece of equipment is actually very simple to use, and every single function works perfectly, never getting in the way of simply producing a great sound.

Conclusion

It's almost unfair to compare these two DIs, as the options that they offer differ widely. The Markbass Super Pro works very well as a bass DI, with good overall control of the sound, but bear in mind it's been designed for active basses, so if you're using a passive bass, achieving good results is difficult, due to the unit's low output. But given the budget-friendly price tag, the Super Pro DI remains good value for money.

The JDV, on the other hand, delivers on every level, and more. The build quality is faultless, it's built to last, and the attention to detail (even the way that the labelling is printed on both the side and top face of the unit, so that you know where everything is situated, whether looking straight at it or from above) is really impressive. Above all else is the pure, hi-fi sound quality that it delivers. The totally noiseless signal that it produces with passive or active pickups, and the control over your tone that it offers, make this a DI of the very, very highest quality.



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

MARKBASS SUPER PRO DI BOX

Price: £90.48

Made in: Italy

Features: Input 1 (instrument), thru input (send to amp), balanced XLR to mic input, ground lift switch, speaker out/line switch

Input impedance: (line) 80 kOhms

Input impedance: (speaker) 12 kOhms

Line attenuation: 21 dB

Speaker attenuation: 47 dB

Dimensions: 140 x 66 x 60 mm

Weight: 0.208 kg

CONTACT DETAILS

Proel International

Tel: 020 8761 9911

www.proelint.co.uk/

www.markbass.it

WHAT WE THINK

Plus: Affordable and easy to use, with a well-balanced and natural tone when using an active bass.

Minus: The low output level might be an issue in a recording environment when using passive basses.

Overall: The Super Pro is so easy to use, and the sound quality that it produces for such a simple (on the surface) piece of kit is a real plus.

BGM RATING OUT OF FIVE

BGM RATING



To hear just how these

DI boxes compare, visit

www.bassguitarmagazine.com

where you can listen to various test recordings, each made using identical levels, and set up with no added EQ.

Equipment used: Yamaha BB1100S Active Bass with EMG pickups; Status Shark Bass (passive); Eden Time Traveler amp; Apogee Duet audio interface into a Mac Pro running Logic 9. Plug-ins used: Universal Audio LA3 compressor, Universal Audio Multiband compressor on the output channel.



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

RADIAL JDV MK3 SUPER DI BOX

Price: £506.85

Made in: Canada

Features: A & B inputs, -15 dB pad, -30 dB input pad, direct thru-put, A & B aux outputs, tuner output, drag control, no-slip full bottom pad, XLR balanced mic level output, 80 Hz high-pass filter, 7 kHz low-pass filter, vary-Z switch polarity reverse switch & ground lift.

Input impedance: 10 kOhms–3.9 mOhms

Output impedance: 600 ohms

Frequency response: 10 Hz–30 kHz (+/-1 dB)

Residual noise: -93 dB@1 V-RMS

Power: 42-volt external DC power supply included

Dimensions: 127 x 158.75 x 38.1 mm

Weight: 1.28 kg

CONTACT DETAILS

SHURE DISTRIBUTION

Tel: 01992 703 058

www.shuredistribution.co.uk

www.radialeng.com

WHAT WE THINK

Plus: Flawless sound quality coupled with top-grade construction. The manual is great too.

Minus: We could mention the price being a bit prohibitive, but quality this good is going to have added value.

Overall: The ease of use of this DI, together with the pure signal quality and routing options on offer, make the Radial JDV a perfect addition to any rig, be it for live performance or recording.

BGM RATING OUT OF FIVE

BGM RATING

