



Crest Audio HP-8 Mixing Console

By Mark Amundson

When the Crest Audio HP-8 Mixing Console was first announced at Winter NAMM 2004, it sparked a great deal of anticipation. Finally, here was a console with pro features at an anklebiter price. But we got through the better part of a year before we actually got our hands on one and, truth is, we were underwhelmed. A call to Crest engineering confirmed that they were aware of the same issues we had noted (manufacturing and not design-related) and said they were being addressed. We opted to wait to review the HP-8 until that happened and it appears to have been worth the wait.

Feature Set

I finally got a 24-channel Crest HP-8 to conduct this review, and started down the checklist of mid-market console “shalls” with the channel strips. Each channel started with an XLR input, phantom power switch, -26dB pad switch, two to 65dB preamp gain control, polarity switch and a three-pole 72Hz Lo-Cut switch. Of note is the lack of a TRS line-in jack, but more on that later.

After the channel strip preamp and TRS insert jack, was a worthy four-band (two swept mid) equalizer section. The mid controls had a fixed Q of 1.5 with nice 100Hz to 2KHz, and 500Hz to 10KHz ranges. The low-frequency shelving control was at 100Hz, and the high-frequency shelving control at 12KHz. All equalizer controls were nicely scaled and had +/-15dB gain knobs.

Tripping on down to my drool-soaked 10 aux sends, they were grouped six, two and two with pre/post fader switches for each group. The fader section was conventional with 100mm faders, PFL switches, mute group switches, subgroup pair switches, main assign switches, mute switch with red LED and an L-R pan control. Metering is done by a single two-color LED for signal present (yellow)/peak (red) indications. Obviously, minimal metering was a designer cost-saving choice, as the PFL switch can provide the ultimate resolution in signal metering. The 100mm fader had about two-thirds the travel in the +/-10dB range, which was unusual to me, but acceptable for most of us.

No stereo input channel strips are provided standalone, but five stereo channels are placed in the master section, above the subgroup and aux masters. Each stereo input has an adequate three-band fixed frequency equalizer with a 60mm fader and complete subgroup and master assigns. The five stereo inputs are further grouped in to three TRS line input channels, and two channels with RCA jacks for CD and/or tape inputs.

Squeezing every last drop of master section real estate, the Crest Audio HP-8 added two matrix outputs with 11 inputs from the masters and subgroups. According to Crest’s owner’s manual, not only are the matrices used for backroom mixes, but it states that they can be used for video shoots where a vocal heavy mix might be desired. A most informative note on matrix usage.

The HP-8 jackpanel has XLR mic inputs, TRS inserts and TS direct outputs for each channel. Although the HP-8 has a nice internal power supply, an external supply jack is available for redundant backup. Aux send masters, subgroup outs and master outs all received companion TRS insert jacks for flexibility. And to top off the complete feature set, a five-year warranty means they are seriously backing their product.

The Road Test

The Crest Audio HP-8 console got its torture test at both the shop and a week-end of gigs. The above feature description meant there was a lot to love, as getting eight subgroups for less than \$5,000, plus the 10 auxes and high-quality mic pre’s and EQs is certainly a heroic feat. But as I worked with the HP-8, I realized its strongest trait is as a 10-mix monitor console. Up top in the master section, each auxiliary (or subgroup) has a dedicated 12-LED bar graph, plus the masters. So five stereo PM mixes, or 10 wedge mixes or something in-between can easily be done by enabling the fader flip switches.

The utility and performance of the HP-8 are top notch. I was told just as the product release was announced that the mic pre’s and equalization were going to industry-leading, and I believe they pretty much lived



up to that goal—though the early production growing pains gave the competition some time to catch up. However, no matter how you slice it today, the Crest HP-8 wins best value in mid-market mixing consoles.

Now, no console is perfect, and I want to air my modest “niggle” list on some features. The first niggle is that no channel TRS inputs means that FOH usage was slightly lessened by forcing me to put the effects returns up on the smaller fader stereo inputs. Now, I know this where they want the effects returns to be, but I personally like nice, wide fader travels to fine-tune effects in difficult room acoustics. CD and tape machines are fine on small faders, but effects returns normally live large with me. Another niggle is something that strikes larger, vastly more expensive consoles, though it does apply to the HP-8. That is the issue of assign switches on channel strips and masters. When grouped together, these switches do not have a lot of on/off throw to easily see which switch is enabled. Combine this with modest console lighting in dark clubs and a desk at waist height, and the visual angle makes detecting switch positions a double-take affair.

My last niggle is more a “me” thing than a console designer thing, and the niggle is the 66% fader range in the +/-10dB area. Now, most of my gigs are moderately-sized clubs where I am fighting a lot of stage wash, and that means many an instrument fader hiding down into the -15 to -30dB range. And when that range is compressed to a centimeter or two of fader travel, I start worrying about the audience mix and having to double-check my finger-to-ear coordination. I have been happy when 50% of fader travel is below -10dB, but compressed scaling is not my biggest thrill. But should you care about “my” niggles? “Not very much” is the appropriate answer, if you need this console’s feature set.

What it is: Mid-Market Mixing Console

Who it’s for: Small soundcos needing a ton of features for demanding clients. Or a very good monitor mix console for local and regional soundcos.

Pros: Top notch mic pres and EQs, great aux/master metering, plenty of aux sends and subgroups.

Cons: No channel TRS line inputs, assign switch throw amount, and 100mm fader taper preference.

How much: Crest Audio HP-8 24-channel, \$4,499.99 MSRP

[You may be tempted to take the opening part of this review as a slam on Crest. Don’t. That would be a mistake. In fact, as far as I am concerned, the fact that there were some issues with early shipping versions of the HP-8 and that they acknowledged and TOOK CARE OF them is a huge compliment. Too many companies would have pretended there was no problem and tried to resolve the issue without anyone knowing about it. And, frankly, too many magazines would have played along. In my rarely humble opinion, this is one place where Crest’s hookup with Peavey is going to really pay off for users. While they may not have the pedigree some big-time sound guys want, my experience is that Peavey makes nearly bulletproof gear and stands behind it 100%.

I have never had a piece of Peavey gear fail on a gig, and any time I had any customer service issue, it was resolved quickly and to my satisfaction. And, no, they did not know I was a magazine editor covering the sound biz when I called. So, hats off to Peavey and Crest for taking the high road and ending up with a hell of a nice console. –Ed.]