

Soundcraft GB8

Luke Kungl gives this new mid-sized eight-bus console the once-over.

Nowadays even the most well respected console manufacturers would admit that, to sell live audio consoles, outstanding performance is not enough. A 24-channel live board weighing 250kg is a novelty now, even if some of these boards still sound fantastic and have transformer-balanced everything (yeah okay, that might be *why* they weigh so much).

Mixing consoles continue to get smaller, lighter and (sometimes) cheaper with more and more features packed tighter and tighter. This trend is no more evident than in Soundcraft's latest offering – the GB range of dual-purpose, mid-sized mixing consoles.

Available in 16-, 24-, 32-, 40- and 48-channel versions (there's also a 12-channel GB4), these consoles rate very high in the price/performance stakes – namely, they're crammed with features. Each frame size has the same range of features (including four stereo input strips, in addition to the mono count) and identical master controls, bus configurations etc.

The GB range shares many features



with its bigger MH series siblings, and compromises where it needs to for space and manufacturing cost. Some

people might even comment on the silver speed curves on the sides, or on how grey seems to be out, and blues and purples are in – I'll refrain.

The Frame

For the purposes of this review I was given the GB8. It's the 40-channel version and measures up at 1.6m from tip to toe. That's a lot of channels in not a lot of space – any smaller, and you'd need hobbit fingers to adjust your EQ. As it stands, while some areas are very tight, Soundcraft manages to get away with it.

The construction seems solid enough, and while the console lacks the proverbial 'strip of railway track' inside to maintain torsion strength, it would be up to the considerable challenges of tour work as well as any. The meter-bridge, while a nifty inclusion, doesn't like to be fitted/unfitted on a daily basis, so if road-case space is an issue, leave it in the cardboard box as it really adds to the height.

The power supply (48V and 17V rails) is internal with LED indicators, although a built-in redundancy connection for an external backup is also included.

To keep costs down, the board is built in sections of eight channels, and a master section, although the each input/output module is a separate circuit board inside. They have however, found room in the budget to include Neutrik connectors for every XLR fitting.

The Inputs

Each mono input strip has the features you would expect from a board of this type, and some nice extras normally reserved for more expensive offerings. There are

switchable phantom, phase reverse and HPF functions on every mono input. The EQ performs like Soundcraft EQ always has – bold and unapologetic! There are

two sweepable mid-range tone controls and a high and low shelf. I would have liked sweepable high and low as well, but we can't have everything.

Each channel features a single point insert with the Soundcraft's customary tip-return wiring. A direct out is also on every channel, which can even be individually switched to act pre-insert or post-fader.

Unfortunately, the stereo channels lack the inserts and direct outs and the EQ section is pared down, as you'd expect (fixed frequency four-band), but there are some other benefits. Each stereo input has a *pair* of XLR inputs, and a pair of TRS inputs. It's possible to switch the left or the right input (or both mono summed) to the main L/R bus, or leave it as a stereo image. (The module is summed mono when sent to auxiliaries.)

The Outputs

On offer are eight mix groups, eight auxiliaries, and four mute groups. Each aux (one through eight) can be switched to pre or post fade, although this is done globally at the master section – a pro or a con depending on the user. Also, while a pre-fade aux send is normally post channel EQ, it can be set to pre-EQ via an internal link – another nice touch.

There are outputs for both the groups and for

aux's, although only one set of inserts. And, yes, they are swappable between FOH and monitor modes. And, no, you don't need to jab a ball-point pen in a tiny hole to activate the swap – it's a nice sensible button in a nice sensible spot. Fader function is swapped, and (unlike the annoying symptom of one of its well-known competitors), the insert point follows the faders (it's normally on the group outputs without swapping a master aux/group strip).

Slightly confusingly, the physical output connectors do not swap. Still, given the amount of routing options Soundcraft is trying to cover in one small space, they do a fine job overall, and by the end of your first show, it becomes apparent that this is a hugely versatile console for its size and weight.

Main mix is via eight groups, left, right and centre. Each channel is assigned to L/R, C or group 1&2 etc. Group masters can be assigned to L/R or mono. The main L/R mix can be sent on to mono, and each have their own insert, as you'd expect.

But wait. There's more.

There's also a 4x11 matrix (made from the eight mix groups, L, C and R) as well as an unbalanced two-track in, which can be sent to the main mix bus.

There are also four stereo returns, which can be sent via their own level control to either the main L/R mix bus, or one set of groups (i.e., stereo return 1 can be switched to groups 1&2, stereo return 2, to groups 3&4 and so on).

There are also alternate stereo outputs and stereo record outputs, each with their own level control, mono sum and C switches (to add the Centre mix to these outputs) and, wait for it, a built-in switchable limiter at +8dBu.

As if that wasn't enough, there is still room for an internal 1kHz oscillator, which shares its routing with the talkback XLR mic input at the rear. This enables tone (or talkback microphone/external tone generator etc) to be sent to the groups (all at once) or to pairs of auxiliaries.

The Monitoring

As far as metering goes, there's a four-segment peak-type LED ramp on every input, and a 12-segment ladder on every group (or aux if swapped) and on L/R and C (Centre is your PFL/AFL when activated).

The headphone and monitor outputs, each with their own level control, source from two-track, C and L/R mix (all selectable), as well as PFL and AFL signals. The meterbridge, for L, R and C AFL levels is a LED ramp that thinks it's a VU... but does look sort of groovy... if you're into that kind of thing! These LED's are weighted to the same ballistics as a traditional M/C VU meter, allowing you to drive the console hard (if that's your thing) without threatening to damage the fragile VU needles.

The verdict

The console is very easy to move, patch up, and work on. The layout is straightforward and, as you might have guessed, very efficient. The preamps and EQ are robust and clean and will cop anything a sensible operator is likely to throw into them (+15dBu XLR and +30dBu line). The headroom available is ample, and although I have only worked on it once thus far, I was suitably impressed with its performance, musically and technically. There's a lot going on in the GB8 – there's far more flexibility and bussing options than you probably have any right to expect for the price.

Whether destined for life in an air-conditioned permanent installation, budget studio, rental-company or on the road, the GB8 seems excellent value for money.



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• GB8 16-channel: \$7,495; 24-channel: \$9,995; 32-channel: \$12,495; 40-channel: \$14,995; 48-channel: \$17,995.