By Stephen Murphy

TASCAM FW-1082
Control Surface/FireWire
Interface

TASCAM's FW-1082 is the little brother of last year's FW-1884 digital audio workstation control surface/audio interface (PAR 7/04). Like the FW-1884, the FW-1082 was codeveloped by TASCAM and Frontier Design Group.

Besides size, the principal differences between the two control surfaces are that the FW-1082 has fewer mic inputs, fewer analog outputs (no analog surround monitor support), fewer MIDI I/Os, no ADAT/optical interface, no word clock I/O and a shorter fader throw.

Despite the comparative reduction in features, the FW-1082 boasts an impressive all-in-one feature set that should satisfy most project studio engineers. And, in concordance with its smaller feature set, the FW-1082 comes with a significantly smaller price tag ($999) – a full $600 less than the FW-1884 ($1,599).

FEATURES

The TASCAM FW-1082 is a touch-sensitive software control surface (four banks of eight faders), a 10 x 2 standalone mixer (with four mic/line inputs and four line-only inputs plus S/PDIF I/O), a 10-in/4-out FireWire computer audio interface, a 32-channel MIDI interface (two MIDI I/Os), and a MIDI device controller. The system's audio converters operate at 24 bits and at sample rates up to 96 kHz.

Fast Facts

■ **Applications:**
Studio

■ **Key Features:**
Touch-sensitive moving fader software control surface; 10 x 2 standalone mixer (4 phantom-powered mic/line inputs, 4 line inputs, S/PDIF I/O); 10 x 4 channel FireWire computer audio interface; 32-channel MIDI interface; MIDI device controller; includes Cubase LE and GigaStudio 3 LE

■ **Price:**
$999

■ **Contact:**
TASCAM at 323-726-0303,
www.tascam.com.

The FW-1082 also includes a switch able low-impedance analog input for directly plugging a guitar or bass into the mixer, plus a headphone amplifier with dedicated output volume control that can feed an existing phones distribution system.

The FW-1082 system is built in a small-footprint wedge-shaped mixer configuration measuring 19 inches wide by 15.2 inches deep and 3.25 inches tall, and weighing about 14 pounds. All connections are made on the rear of the unit.

The first four analog inputs feature mic (XLR) and balanced line (TRS 1/4-inch) connections, as well as unbalanced insert loops using the standard TRS send/receive configuration. Phantom power can be globally sent out the mic jacks via a rear-panel switch. In addition to the remaining four analog line inputs (TRS 1/4-inch), the FW-1082 features coax S/PDIF I/O (RCA), two six-pin FireWire connections, two sets of MIDI I/O, stereo analog outputs (TRS 1/4"), a footswitch jack and a headphone output.

The FW-1082 system includes Steinberg Cubase LE DAW software and GigaStudio 3 LE software sampler, and the interface is supported under Windows (XP and 2000) and Mac (OSX 10.2.8 or later). See TASCAM's web site for system requirements. Five software control modes are provided for interfacing with various software applications: native protocol for use with dedicated control plug-ins, Cubase LE mode, Cubase SX/Nuendo mode, Mackie Control and HUI emulation. TASCAM provides useful application-specific guides on its website and on the FW-1082's CD-ROM.

The control surface features nine 60mm touch-sensitive moving faders – eight for individual channels plus one master fader; above each of the eight channel faders is a mute, solo and channel select button. Also on the surface is a tape-style transport section with a jog/shuttle wheel and marker/locate support. A four-band EQ control strip located above the transport section also acts as pan and aux level control on the cur-

Project Studio

rently selected software channel.

IN USE

Set up of the TASCAM FW-1082 was straightforward and painless: install the driver software, turn off the computer, connect and turn on the FW-1082, restart the computer, allow Windows to recognize the new interface and complete the install. It's nice to see that serious install problems of computer peripherals have, for the most part, gone away.

I tested the FW-1884 in its various modes with several software applications including Steinberg Nuendo (in Mackie Control and HUI modes), Cakewalk Sonar (in native mode) and in Sony Vegas (in generic mode). The test computer was a 3.06 GHz PC running Windows XP Professional and outfitted with two TC PowerCore cards and one Universal Audio UAD-1 card.

As with the FW-1884, set up and operation within the different applications was easy and intuitive, though the depth of functionality varied depending on the control mode and chosen application. In all software applications tested, channel fader and master fader movements, pan adjustments, fader bank selects, and channel selects/solos/mutes worked like a charm. Sonar, with its native FW-1884 support, featured the tightest implementation.

Sound quality of the FW-1082 is very good, and the mic preamps are clean and quiet. Take extra care in setting levels, as the mic inputs tend to break up easily in the upper ranges. A bit of the old analog compression patched in through an insert loop goes a long way in obtaining good and safe levels in preparation for the analog-to-digital conversion.

Just like the FW-1884, one of the FW-1082's principal strengths for project studios is its ease in creating a latency-free cue mix while recording. Since the recording signal leaves the system directly after the preamps, you are free to use the faders to create a recording cue mix of the incoming live signals, balanced against the previously recorded tracks coming back from the computer application. There is no need to use direct monitoring or sound card mixer schemes to reroute live audio to the outputs.

Wish List Dept: Though I lodged the same complaint against the FW-1884 (so it is even less likely that this significantly less expensive model would accommodate), I do wish TASCAM had incorporated a simple talkback system on the FW-1082. It's just about the only thing missing from this otherwise complete recording system.

SUMMARY

Despite the features-versus-price trade offs made in this smaller sibling of the FW-1884, the FW-1082 is an excellent and feature-rich all-in-one recording solution. At a street price of around $700 for a 10-channel FireWire computer interface, motorized and touch sensitive control surface, 32-channel MIDI interface and stand-alone analog mixer, the TASCAM FW-1082 is quite a bargain.

PAR Studio Editor Stephen Murphy has over 20 years production and engineering experience, including Grammy-winning and Gold/Platinum credits. His website is www.smurphco.com.