



Review

by Andrew Keoghan



Digitech JamMan Delay: Looper Phaser Sampler

When I think Digitech I generally picture a long board of footswitches with dazzling lights, ripe and ready for the next alpha male to shred their way up and down a guitar fretboard at mind-numbing speed, sporting a facial grimace akin to dental extraction without anaesthetic. Yes, the Utah-based company does provide such a platform of expression, but it can also boast supporting all manner of artists' gear rosters; from Willie Nelson, to Megadeath, from Billie Idol to Queens of the Stoneage. Even Phil Collins.

The brand has gained a reputation for well-built, user-friendly products of reputable quality and the Digitech JamMan looks no exception. It's not a heavy unit but it has a solid construction and it's stable – you certainly don't feel, while stomping on any of the eight footswitches, that it will move or break.

And the JamMan Delay pedal doesn't suffer from overzealous wizardry, at least in a visual sense. It is highly functional with just one Menu button and one small display where you can scroll through the essential options for looping. It is more comparable in design terms to the Line 6 DL4 – the green looper/delay you may have seen Liam Finn use with aplomb in the past. I use the Boss Loop Station RC20XL – a straight looper with a two-pedal system. I refer to both of these, mainly because I think if you're looking at buying a loop pedal, they're the current reigning champions priced at around the \$600 mark, with which I have now to compare the more expensive JamMan (rrp \$749).

I set about using the JamMan as much as I could without the manual and was pleasantly surprised. Looping on it is simple – hit the footswitch to start recording and play in the phrase you want to loop, then hit the same switch again to start that phrase repeating. I found the footswitch system a little easier for timing the length of loops precisely, as opposed to the Boss unit I use, which has a pedal system.

With the JamMan, if you like the loop you've created, you can save it on an internal memory that boasts plenty of real estate – there's up to 35 minutes of memory and 99 available slots to save your loops. In comparison, the Boss Loop Station offers 16 minutes space and 11 loop slots. On the Line 6 you can't pre-save loops and it can't record a loop length of longer than 14 seconds. So yes, the stats stack up well for Digitech's JamMan, though I can't imagine ever needing 35 minutes of space while playing live. It depends if you're looping on the fly live. For that you don't need a lot of space. The extra memory would come in handy if you had a lot of pre-saved looped material you wanted to trigger live. I guess that's what Milli Vanilli did a lot of and it got them to #1 in Austria. Different strokes etc. etc.

The JamMan has two more footswitches that let you scroll up and down through the various loop slots you've pre-saved and you can do this as you're playing live. Theoretically you can play say, loop #1 that you've pre-saved, then using the footswitch line up loop #2 to start when you want it. This would enable you to be playing a loop in a certain rhythm and



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can save up to three at any one time, on the three top footswitches of the pedal.

The 'multiplier' button is handy too. It allows you to change the current time pattern of the delay, so you can change the note value of the echo, from fast to slow, from every second beat, to triplets and so on. This is also fairly common on delays but not many are as simple to use as the JamMan, which shows this as note values, rather than as 80 milliseconds, 300 milliseconds etc, which adds confusion on some pedals.

The Digitech JamMan is impressively the first of its price range to fully integrate looping with a healthy array of delay options. Its overall useability is what makes it an excellent newcomer to the loop pedal madness that is infusing the music world.

The next level will be a loop pedal for under a grand that allows you loop up and then peel layers back one by one. At present there is nothing in this price range that does this and it would allow loop pedals to be used more dynamically. For now it's a case of looping up your rich tapestry of texture, then pressing stop/start without too much latitude in between. Still, the Digitech JamMan offers plenty of user-friendly features for the bedroom musician to hone their skills and tinker with looping. There's also enough for the live performer to sink their teeth into, and then some.

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then move quickly into a different feel. I found this difficult to line up and it seems to require a level of foot-eye co-ordination you'd likely want to avoid in the heat of live performance. But it's nice to know that it's possible.

The JamMan has 10 rhythm tracks to play along to, and while these are handy for practising over, they're not something I would be drawn to use live. There are three loop stop modes and these are very useful. You can choose either a dead stop with the tap of your foot, or timed to stop at the end of a complete phrase, or a discreet fade out. This has been the most useful feature for me on the Boss Loop Station and is one thing lacking on the Line 6.

And so to what I think makes the JamMan justified in its higher price tag than both the competitors mentioned. The JamMan also has a delay unit, but more importantly you can loop the delayed sound you've chosen. This for me is the frustration with the Line 6. While it has excellent analogue and digital delay sounds, the most annoying thing is that the delay and loop are mutually exclusive – you can only loop the clean sound coming from your instrument. If you're mid-loop and try to change the dial to any of the delays, the loop you're playing stops.

The JamMan seems to have avoided this. Where it heads out the Boss in some respects is that the JamMan not only has delay effects, it has stereo outs that you can send to two different amps. The Boss only has mono out. In stereo of course you get that effect of certain delay sounds seemingly bouncing from amp to the other amp.

The JamMan delay settings are mostly what you would expect to see, but with a couple of nice surprises. There are two 'modify' knobs that can create some weird quivering, slightly off-pitch textures, more naturally when on the modulation delay setting. The tape echo sound was fairly true. The 'low-fi' delay setting mimics an old vintage digital delay – a short, sharp, decayed sound that would satisfy dub fans. Analogue, pong, slap and reverse make up a fairly comprehensive smorgasbord. Once you've found your delay sounds of choice, you

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