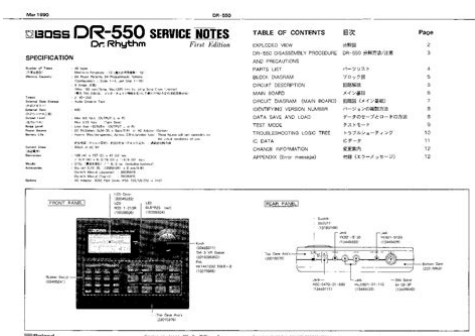


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However, proving that beauty is more than skin deep and size isn't everything, the most attractive aspect of the DR550 is that it earns its extra nought by packing a fair amount of sophistication into its compact frame. Most importantly, the new DRs drum and percussion samples match those of Rolands R5, R8 and R8M in quality in fact, a number of them have their origins in the Rseries library. At the same time, Boss have kept the 550s complement of sounds to a very creditable 48 the R machines have 64 each, which is a good deal more than have appeared on previous Boss drum machines for instance, the DR55 had four sounds and the DR110 six. However, before your ardour gets too aroused, I should point out that, unlike the R8 and R8M but like the R5, the 550 can't play further sounds via plugin PCM sample cards. Quite sensibly, Boss have opted for a solid collection of standard kit sounds leavened by a workable if not extensive selection of Latin percussion instruments. The 550 is 12voice polyphonic, which means that up to 12 instruments can sound at the same time. The 550 brings the DR range into the MIDI age belatedly if not wholeheartedly equipped only with a MIDI In, it can be slaved to a MIDI sequencer and have its sounds played from a MIDI keyboard or percussion controller, but obviously you can't transfer pattern and song data via MIDI SysEx for remote storage. Time to dust down the trusty Elftone Compucorder and press it into service once again. Once you've selected Tape mode, Save, Verify and Load functions can be activated by pressing the Start button; the Tempo LED flashes for the duration of the operation, and Verify and Load operations are concluded with a message telling you whether or not they've been successful which in practice they were every time I used them. Each operation takes a little under 90 seconds, which is bearable, I suppose.

The latest DR can be powered from an optional Boss PSA Series power supply unit or from six AAtype batteries; the latter give a quoted lifespan, under continuous use, of nine hours for manganese batteries and 23 hours for the alkaline type the type you'd typically use in a Walkman. These batteries also preserve the contents of the 550s memory when the drum machine is switched off, so you need to beware running them down. Also, to avoid losing your patterns and songs while changing batteries you need to maintain power to the 550 via a psu. SOUNDS THE DR550s 48

samples are organised into eight categories kick, snare, side stick, tom, hihat, cymbal, percussion, effect. There are five bass drums room, dry, solid, face and techno which between them provide a good range of acoustic and electronic kick sounds. The six snares are similarly varied in character, from the massive reverb snare through the ringing, rattling rimshot to the snappy TR808 snare. The toms category provides low, mid and high room toms along with the more resonant low, mid and high attack toms, and low and high electronic toms. TR808 samples crop up again in the hihats, which include the 808s electronicsounding open and closed hihats along with open, closed and pedal closed hihats of acoustic origin. More splashy sounds are provided by crash cymbal, ride cymbal and ride cymbal bell samples which, like the Rseries samples, capture the character of the sounds well, avoiding dissolving into undifferentiated highfrequency hiss in fact, I think these are Rseries samples. Here the fact that sample memory is at a premium on the 550 is most obvious, with these longer samples ending before you expect them to. Of the three effects, High Q is a highly concussive electronic click, the sort of sound much used by Kraftwerk, which sounds like its been sampled from an old analogue synth with a very sharp filter attack.

Scratch Low and Scratch High appear to be sampled record scratches as in DJ scratching rather than knackered records, but theyre better used as abstract rather than imitative sounds. Its worth emphasising at this point that, while the DR550s sound quality might be on a par with that of the Roland Rseries drum machines, it loses out in sonic versatility compared to those machines through not allowing you to pitchshift its samples up and down. Anyone who remembers and who perhaps still has the pleasure of looking at the multicoloured front panels of old Roland instruments like the JP8, Juno 106 and TR808 will know that in the past Roland could hardly be accused of producing dourlooking instruments. Yet what do we get nowadays. Endless variations on sombre charcoal grey. Whats wrong with a splash of colour, eh. The DR550 is a case in point. To be more specific, its a sombre charcoal grey case in point, with only marginally less gloomy grey buttons. This glum appearance isnt helped by the fact that the otherwise generous LCD window is perhaps inevitably on a budget instrument such as this not backlit. What it does do is display in its upper half the currentlyselected Pad Bank, the Scale of the current pattern its quantisation and the Accent rhythm or the rhythm of any one of the instruments assigned to the drum machines pads. In this respect its less well specified than the old Boss DR110, which can display in grid format the rhythms of up to four of its six instruments together with the accent rhythm. However, you can very easily select a different instrument or Accent for the 550s display by holding down the Voice button and tapping the relevant instrument pad. The lower half of the LCD, meanwhile, divides into three boxes which variously display such information as the current and next pattern numbers, the current song and song step number, and the current edit parameter and its value.

Although theyre of the squidgy rubber variety, they seem to be operationally reliable. The 550 also has 12 rubber playing pads, which stood up well to the bashing they received during this review with fingertips rather than drumsticks, I hasten to add. These pads arent velocity sensitive, but then Id have been pleasantly surprised if they were. The 550s sounds are velocityresponsive via MIDI, but although you can record patterns into the drum machines memory from an external MIDI source an Octapad, for instance disappointingly, MIDI velocity information isnt recorded. This effectively gives you equal access to not 12 but 48 sounds from the 550s instrument pads, all of which can be used within a single pattern. Successive presses of the dedicated Pad Bank button rotate around the four Banks AD. To understand how the DR550 functions, its important to grasp that when you record a pattern the drum machine is storing pad hits only. If you record a cowbell part using pad three in Pad Bank four, say, and then assign a cabasa to that pad instead, your cowbell part will become a cabasa part. This way of working makes it easy to try out different sounds for an already recorded rhythm, plus its easy to delete a part from a rhythm because you can quickly find the pad that its assigned to. The down side is that any alterations you make to a Pad Bank to suit a new pattern that youre recording will affect any alreadyrecorded patterns which use that Pad Bank. Its the perennial

swings and roundabouts situation. The advantage of this approach is that when the DR550s manual says you can record 64 onebar patterns it means 64 onebar patterns regardless of how dense or sparse the rhythms are. Most of the operational buttons and instrument pads have a second function which is selected by holding down the Shift button and then pressing the relevant button or pad.

The most difficult thing about using these functions is reading the labelling which identifies them more shades of grey on grey. In practice the DR550 is a straightforward and fairly intuitive instrument which presents no real operational or conceptual problems for anyone already familiar with the way drum machines work. The beginner should find the 550 a reasonably friendly machine to get to grips with, especially as the accompanying manual is clearly written and well laid out, and includes what is now becoming for Roland instruments, anyway the customary index to help you get straight to the information on anything you don't understand. PAD SETTINGS EACH INSTRUMENT PAD within a Pad Bank can be assigned not only one of the 48 instruments but values for level, tone colour, decay, assign type, accent follow and pan parameters. Level setting is accessed via a dedicated Level button, and as the name suggests, allows you to set a volume level for each pad. Tone colour 07 provides a means of subtly varying the timbre of an instrument when its assigned to a pad. You can record an Accent rhythm in the same way as you'd record a rhythm using any of the instruments. Accent is either on or off, and applies to all instruments sounding at a particular step. A value of zero means that the instrument won't respond to accents, while a negative value results in the instrument playing more quietly on an accented step. This approach does allow for a fair amount of flexibility, though should two instruments with the same accent follow value both sound on an accented step, both will have the same response even if you only want one of them to be accented. Again, assigning the same instrument to more than one pad and giving each pad a different accent follow value can help you get around any problems. Assign type allows you to set an instrument pad to Mono, Poly or Exclusive 1 or 2.

If a pad is set to Mono, new pad hits cut short the instrument if it's still sounding from a previous pad hit, while Poly allows the instrument to play for its full duration, so that the sounds overlap. Setting two or more pads to the same Exclusive number effectively means that the instruments assigned to those pads can't be layered, which also means that you can use one instrument to cut short another. A traditional choice here would be open and closed hi-hats, but you can choose whatever combination of instruments you want. Finally, the DR550 allows you to select one of seven pan values for each pad in each Pad Bank, so that if you're taking advantage of the drum machine's stereo audio outs you can position up to 48 instruments in the stereo image. You can also experiment with autopanning effects by assigning an instrument to two or more pads and giving each pad a different pan value, but as with the other pad parameters this is at the expense of the variety of instruments you can use for your patterns. RECORDING THE DR550 ALLOWS you to record in real time and step time. Once you've selected Pattern Record mode, both methods are equally available to you when the pattern is playing you're in realtime record, when it's stopped you're in step time record. You get a quarter note metronome click with settable level 015 and a flashing red pinpoint LED to play along to. In step time recording, the DR550 records what pads you play at each step in the bar while playing back whatever instruments, if any, you've already recorded for that step, and automatically advances to the next step after each hit and loops back to the first step when it reaches the end of the bar. As in realtime recording, the DR550 is permanently in overdub mode for step time recording. Scale, meanwhile, allows you to alter the quantisation of a pattern. This defaults to 16th notes, but alternatively you can select 32nd notes, triplet 16ths or triplet 8ths.

Another possible limitation of the 550s approach, depending on what sort of rhythms you want to create, is that you can't combine triplet and non-triplet values triplet 8ths and straight 8ths, for example. Creating a DR550 Song is easy. You just scroll through the Song steps entering the required pattern number for each step. If you hit Start or Continue in Song Edit mode, the 550

repeatedly plays the pattern you've entered at the current step, which quickly allows you to see if you've chosen the right pattern. You can also start playing a Song from any step while in Song Play mode by scrolling to that step and then hitting Continue. You can also set an Initial Tempo value 40-250bpm for each of the eight Songs which, of course, only applies when the 550 is set to internal sync. The drum machine has a global tempo value which defaults to 120bpm each time you switch the machine on, but as soon as you select a Song that value changes to the Song's initial tempo value. Consequently, if you're working to and fro between Pattern and Song modes. Pattern mode automatically assumes whatever initial tempo value the Song is set to. MIDI THE DR550 CAN be set to internal sync or slaved to incoming MIDI clocks. For the purposes of playing the drum machine's sounds from an external MIDI source you can set it to Omni receive all channels, or to one of the 16 MIDI channels it defaults to channel 10, the channel which Roland have ordained as the rhythm channel on their instruments. For MIDI performance purposes you assign instrument pads rather than the actual instruments themselves to MIDI note numbers, which means that if a DR550 instrument isn't assigned to one of the 48 possible pads then you can't play it via MIDI. The 550 comes with a default set of pad-to-note assignments, but you can alter these to suit your own preferences.

The 550 allows you to set up such an assignment, but in practice the drum machine only plays the sound which is assigned to the lowest-numbered pad in or closest to Pad Bank A. The 550 can respond to MIDI Song Select messages, allowing you to remotely select its internal Songs. However, one MIDI message it won't respond to is Song Position Pointer, the message, which tells a sequencer or drum machine where to start playing from in a song. Consequently, if you're slaving it off a sequencer and you've stopped the sequencer mid-song, and fast-forwarded or rewound it to a different position, the 550 won't be able to tell where to play from. Which is rather a disappointment in this day and age, and one good reason to use the 550 purely as a sound source, putting together all your rhythm parts in your sequencer rather than using the 550's onboard pattern and song facilities. VERDICT THE NEW DR Rhythm has instant appeal from the moment you see it to the moment you hear its high-quality sounds to the moment you discover that it's easy to use. Boss have concentrated on providing a solid collection of standard kit and Latin instruments rather than dazzling you with a diverse collection of more exotic instruments, and have ensured a good balance of acoustic and electronic sounds with an overall clean, upfront quality. The 550 is far more versatile sonically and far more sophisticated functionally than its predecessors, and benefits from the introduction of MIDI, at last, to the Dr Rhythm series. I have a few reservations about its rhythm programming flexibility, but what it loses in flexibility it gains in simplicity. If you want sonic expandability and greater programming sophistication then it might be worth hanging on for Cheetah's forthcoming 16-bit drum machine, the MD16. But then you're talking half as much again on the price, which can be a lot to find if you're on a tight budget.

The point is that Boss have packed a lot into the DR550 for its price and for its size, and have made it all easy to use in a way which should be attractive not only to the first-time buyer but also to anyone who likes their hi-tech instruments to be accessible. You can always wish for more of everything on a budget instrument, but overall Boss have come up with a balance of sounds, facilities, and accessibility on the DR550 which is well suited to its very attractive asking price, and I expect it will be a big success for them. Now, which pocket did I put it in. Price 199 including VAT Contact Details. To start viewing messages, Can't find any better help Anywhere!!!! Ques What is the best drum machine for good sounding rock drums All the older machines seem to favor the 808 909 and the newer ones seem to be geared towards trance/hiphop/rap. I'm just looking for some decent rock/not metal, just solid. I'm currently using the ones on my Yamaha PSR550's auto-accompaniment section, but they are just not punchy enough. Also, if I recorded the drums from the 550 to a Cakewalk MIDI sequence, would they playback on any of the newer Boss JS5, DR670, DR770 machines or would I have to edit the sequence heavily. I just like to use the Yamaha to create mainly

backing tracks when I compose. I am a guitar player, so all this midi editing stuff is too time consuming and a lot of it over my head. So any ideas short of samples TIA PEACE. There's good punch on the kicks, good snap on snares and the 808 crap snares in the 550, and the toms sound good. Cymbals are pretty good, even usable, for the price range. A midi track in cake will play back any machine. You should be able to use any machine to create rock, as long as you can adjust the sounds the way you like them. You might be able to use the machine you have, just try an EQ or cheap effects unit on it. The song should be 3 measures of B11 then B12. This deleted the second measure, the song is now B11, B11, B12.

While on measure 2, hold shift and press small number button 1 insert AND while still holding the shift button, use the small numbered buttons to type in 13. You could also press the bank button to change to A13 AND while still holding the shift button press ACC. The song is now B11, B13, B11 and B12. Multiple Tempos This feature is as impractical as using odd meter in patterns and eats your song memory right up. You can combine multiple songs like a playlist with different initial tempos into a single song. The songs have to be written in order, i.e. song 6 goes to song 7, 7 to 8, etc 8 to 1. I'll save that for Lesson 7 The Copy Button. Apologize for busting into your tutorial. Continue your master class on the Dr550 please. Interesting stuff. Gonna grab my headphones and head over to Mars and check a few Boss machines out. Never would have thought to bring em. Great idea! Peace. Hold the shift and press small button 4 COPY. AND while still holding the shift button, enter the number of the pattern you want to copy FROM. Don't forget you can use the bank button AND while still holding the shift button, press ACC. Hold the shift and press small button 4 COPY. AND while still holding the shift button, enter the number of the song you want to copy FROM. I know this is an old thread but in case you look back here I say cheers to you! It's a 4MB file, about 132 pages. When I do that and then press start I get a pattern, not the metronome. Maybe the previous user reset the level button. Any ideas Should I erase all the patterns Thanks, Al Told me everything I needed to know about my 770 Takes a couple of days for him to get back to you though because he says this stuff is just a hobby for him. User Alert System provided by Super PM System provided by. All Rights Reserved. The mkII's Boss DR550 MK II Dr.

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