

Apogee Rosetta 200

Sharing many of the innovations introduced in other models in Apogee's range, the 200 adds twists and turns all of its own. **ROB JAMES** test drives a 2-channel, 24-bit/192kHz A-D/D-A convertor.



MENTION CONVERTORS IN POLITE company and the name Apogee is bound to crop up. The Santa Monica based firm has built an enviable reputation for designing above average conversion solutions at a price that, although it could never be described as low, is well below the more esoteric high-end stuff. A recent addition to the family is the Rosetta 200. A close relative of the Rosetta 800 (*Resolution V3.3* — see this for Rob's expository discourse on the Rosetta stone. Ed) and AD/DA 16X units (*Resolution V3.6*), not to mention the Big Ben master clock (*Resolution V2.6*), the Rosetta 200 has a new trick or two up its 1U sleeve. It is the first Apogee device to feature sample rate conversion and a suite of three 'finishing' processes dubbed 'CODA'. Like the other X range products it also accepts a range of interface cards including the eagerly awaited FireWire interface that I had for this review.

Physically the Rosetta 200 follows Apogee 'house style' in looks, operation and sound and the unit also makes use of Apogee's two stage 'Intelliclock' technology (as employed in the Big Ben clock unit) to minimise jitter. Intelliclock is really two clocks in one. A rapid response, but range tolerant, 'read' clock, loads a FIFO buffer, while an ultra-low-jitter 'write' clock schedules the clock 'ticks' out of the buffer to synchronise the convertors. Two LEDs, amusingly arranged as an exclamation mark indicate the presence and quality of lock. If the red dot is lit you're safe, but if only the green stroke is lit it's time to start investigating the cause.

Apogee house style means a pretty neutral sound but with an emphasis on maximising levels with the characteristic proprietary Soft Limit on the analogue inputs and UV22HR bit reduction before the outputs, if you want to invoke them.

The basic unit is a reasonable UK£1395 (+ VAT) and provides analogue, Toslink and coaxial SPDIF plus AES-EBU I-O as standard. There is also Word clock I-O with switchable termination and MIDI I-O for updating the firmware or, when used with the optional X-FireWire card (UK£295 + VAT), as a MIDI interface for the connected workstation. When I looked at the Rosetta 800 early last year, the X-FireWire interface was not available but I noted that it had the potential to significantly raise the game. Early versions of the card had FireWire 800 and 400 connections. The

current version just has two FireWire 400 sockets, which keeps things relatively simple.

Driver and software installation is not the simplest I've encountered but, meticulously following the instructions, it worked first time. Using the X-FireWire card gives the added bonus of MIDI I-O so just add a monitor controller and mic preamps and you have a complete solution for stereo recording with a PC or Mac.

Apogee supplies a small applet, FireMix, which sits between the DAW application and the Rosetta. For the 200, FireMix allows low latency mixing and monitoring in the native environment with accurate metering.

As with its sibling Rosetta 800 the front panel controls appear deceptively simple, however, I still found myself reaching for the manual sooner than I would have wished. Pressing and holding buttons gives access to another layer of settings and other keys then modify some parameters. Like the Big Ben and Rosetta 800 this unit has a programmable power switch (via an internal jumper) that can work as normal — when power is applied the unit must be switched on via the front panel switch — or set to wake up powered on but with the switch still operational.

Four 12-segment LED bargraph meters look at the digital level of the current digital and analogue source selections. They are calibrated from -50dB to OUCH — 0dBfs or higher. In calibration mode the scale is zoomed-in to a range of -20 to -10dBfs. Each single LED only lights when the level is within 0.1dB of the specified level enabling precise adjustment.

The CODA finishing module comprises three processes. UV22HR dither is already familiar and considered de rigeur by many, but SRC (Sample Rate Conversion) is new to Apogee with the Rosetta 200, as is the Aptomizer. The company claims this is the first time it has been happy enough with the quality of SRC to include it in a product. In the absence of a major objective trial I can report that the Apogee solution is as transparent as any other real-time convertor I've auditioned.

SRC is available on any one digital source to analogue and digital outputs. A future firmware upgrade will add an automatic SRC option where sample rate conversion will be applied to the selected digital input only when required. The Aptomizer

process automatically sets calibration levels of the analogue inputs and outputs. A 'learn' mode analyses the input level, looking for the highest peak detected on the analogue inputs. This level is used to adjust the gain such that the highest peak results in a level of -5dBfs at the digital outputs. To maintain unity gain the analogue input and output levels are adjusted reciprocally. A trim mode allows the automatic calibration value to be adjusted in 0.1dB steps.

Apogee consolidates its range with the Rosetta 200. It introduces a couple of useful innovations to the solid, high quality conversion formula, SRC and the Aptomizer, which will no doubt find their way into future products if the user reaction is favourable. Meanwhile, the user interface remains a little quirky but the sound makes up for it. Apogee deservedly belongs in the short list of names to consider when looking for convertor solutions and the Rosetta 200 dots another i and crosses another t. ■

PROS

For stereo it may be the only interface you will need; modularity adds to versatility; silent.

CONS

User interface somewhat impenetrable without resorting to the manual.

EXTRAS

Option cards — The X-Digi-Mix card interfaces directly with Pro Tools Mix Core or Farm cards and also provides a Superclock (FSx256) output.



The X-HD option card allows direct connectivity between Pro Tools|HD systems and the X series units. The X-FireWire Card enables direct connection to any FireWire-equipped computer. Two FireWire 400 sockets allow further X-Series units to be daisy-chained from a single PC or Mac connection.

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