



HEAD TO HEAD

Teenage Engineering OP-1 Field **vs** OP-1

Teenage Engineering's OP-1 is one of the most desirable pieces of music production gear of the past decade. In fact, when TE temporarily stopped making the OP-1 in 2018, it became so essential that secondhand prices soared into four figures, well beyond its initial price.

A few years on, though, and perhaps realising the technology was well over a decade old, Teenage Engineering went back to the OP-1 drawing board, and at this year's Superbooth, announced OP-1 Field. This is a much pimped-up OP-1 - not a replacement, more a flashier and more expensive older sibling that TE describes as 'a continuation' of the OP-1 line. It has 100 more features,

an even more eye-watering price tag and has caused enough of a buzz to finally knock secondhand prices of the original OP-1 into a much more sensible territory.

But can OP-1 Field really be worth £1,999? Let's find out...

Design & build

Put side by side you'd be hard-pressed to tell what has changed between the two OP-1s at first. So, what are the differences? OP-1 Field is a tad lighter and not quite as deep as OP-1. It also boasts velcro pads beneath it so you can attach it to your keyboard or laptop. The biggest difference you notice on power up is the speaker, which on Field comes with a passive radiator and 'side-shooting loudspeaker grill'. It's not

obviously bigger but is louder than that on the OP-1, and has a much better acoustic design and sound, with the bass far more noticeable.

Then there's Field's screen. It's still not a touchscreen, but it is a big improvement over the original OP-1. The new screen offers much more detail, plus there's an adjustable brightness control.

The screen and speaker tip the balance massively towards Field, then. Plus, the FM antenna on Field is built into its body, which keeps the unit more compact, and the aluminium surround feels very sturdy.

AND THE WINNER IS...

The OP-1 FIELD takes the lead here because of the speaker, and the extra screen detail is stunning.

Sounds and tone

With an extra synth engine, stereo everywhere, extra sampling features and overhauled beats section, Field is sonically more diverse. The new synth engine, Dimension, is decent if not mind-blowing, and you wonder if it could be added to the original OP-1 as a software update.

More impressive are the synth sampling and drum extras. With different kits and improved sample zooming, everything looks, feels and sounds that much more professional. It still uses the same cool way of dividing up a break or lengthy sample (the maximum time has increased to 20 seconds) into constituent beats, but there's more accuracy and extra envelope options for transient editing.

The biggest factors that affect the sound are the stereo enhancements and the physical speaker. The stereo effects reveal just how exceptional the stereo sound can now be, with an all-new Mother reverb adding a lot to the rich reverb atmosphere that Field is capable of - it's pretty stunning.

AND THE WINNER IS...

OP-1 FIELD wins with more recording options, stereo, more space and a better speaker to hear it all.



AT A GLANCE



Teenage Engineering OP-1 £1,399

- > Battery life: 16 hours
- > Number of presets: Around 170
- > Number of engines: 13
- > 14 sampled kits plus 10 D-Box kits
- > Number of effects: 7
- > Number of sequencers: 7
- > Sample time, 12s drum, 6s synth
- > Weight (kg): 0.58



Teenage Engineering OP-1 Field £1,999

- > Battery life: 24 hours
- > Number of presets: Around 200
- > Number of engines: 14
- > 15 sampled kits plus 10 D-Box kits
- > Number of effects: 8
- > Number of sequencers: 8
- > Sample time: 20s
- > Weight (kg): Around 0.53

Hardware and features

The big news is that OP-1 Field has at least 100 extra features, although some are way more important than others (we're not that excited by 'new font' and 'new packaging').

The speaker, stereo routing and screen are the biggies, while a bolstered internal memory of 256MB helps deliver sample storage of a whopping 160 minutes (24 minutes on OP-1) and around 200 presets (170 on OP-1). There's also a built-in antenna for the FM radio – for both receiving and transmitting (so you can broadcast, albeit over limited range). Perhaps most importantly, you get an extended battery life of 24 hours with Field – that's 50% more than OP-1.

One of the coolest features is the 'tape' recorder, which is really a multitrack digital recorder but exhibits lots of retro functions and works well as a sketchpad. Field adds a Click To Hold Sequencer to these tools. You also get four different 'tape machine' options: Studio and Vintage 4-track reel-to-reel, Porta 4-track cassette and – this is so Teenage Engineering – a MiniDisc (Disc Mini) option. Of course you do. Each has its own character, albeit rather subtle. We didn't get as much lo-fi as we

were expecting with the Porta/ cassette option, but the saturation on the Vintage tape is noticeable.

Suffice to say, Field does have a lot more going for it. Teenage Engineering say it's 'louder, thinner and 100 times better'. We'd argue with all of that (it's not massively louder or thinner and the pedant in us obviously wants to point out that '100 times better' is factually incorrect) but overall there are massive improvements. The screen and speaker alone make you feel like you're getting an instant return on your extra cash outlay, but the extras you'll discover as you dig deeper into the taping, sampling and stereo mixing will reward you even more.

AND THE WINNER IS...

OP-1 FIELD It's not '100 times better', but at least half of the 100 extras feel absolutely essential.

FM VERDICT

It's time to grasp the very thorny issue of money. The original OP-1 cost \$799 on release in 2011. Second-hand prices topped \$1,300 in 2018 when the machine was discontinued, so perhaps that's why Teenage Engineering thought they could justify \$1,299 when they reintroduced it in 2019. It now costs £1,399 if you buy it directly from TE (currently sold out) or around £1,049 at your local dealer.

OP-1 Field, however, is an eye-watering £1,999 through TE, or a much more realistic £1,599 from Thomann, BAX or other dealers. Is it worth the extra £5-600? The answer is – perhaps controversially – yes. We were surprised by just how much of a difference the better speaker makes, but perhaps shouldn't have been; it's an essential plus point for a mobile music making device, after all. Throw

in the improved screen and at least 50 essential extras and that's about a tenner for each extra feature.

But, while Field might be worth £600 more, we don't think the original is worth anywhere near its latest asking price. OP-1 Field is a big improvement and, if anything, makes the OP-1 look dated and overpriced. You can now pick up an original OP-1 secondhand for around £700 in top condition – with extras like the MeMe Antenna or Analogue cases thrown in.

So here's where we stand with OP-Field vs OP-1. OP-1-Field is exceptional, and a huge improvement over the original. Don't pay \$/£1,999 for it, though; you can get a brand new M2 MacBook Air for less. If you must have a Field then you can shave at least 20% off that price by shopping around.

And don't spend \$/£1,399 on a new OP-1, either. Again, shop around for 20% off. But if you just want to find out why everyone keeps going on about OP-1, then perhaps the best way to experience it is to go down the secondhand route for an original, where you'll shave up to 50% off.

Either way, the OP-1 saga looks set to continue. Add one to your cassette collection now. **FM**