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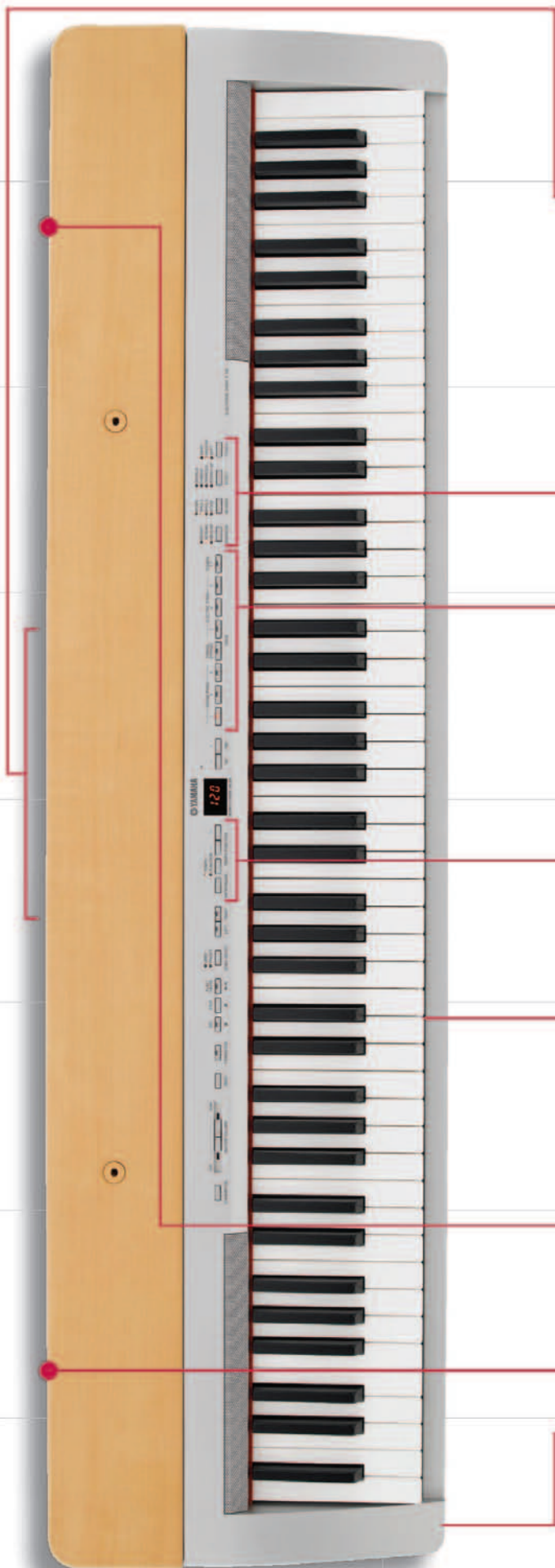
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YAMAHA P-140

DIGITAL PIANO

by Michael Gallant



Stereo RCA and MIDI in and out jacks give the P-140 basic connectivity, though a pair of 1/4" outs would have been a nice addition.

It's easy and intuitive to touch a button and scroll through reverb, effect, keyboard sensitivity, and tonal variation parameters.

Fourteen voices are basic but meaty, especially for an instrument meant for the home and hobby markets.

Everybody needs more time spent practicing with a metronome. Yup, even you. This one's built in and super-convenient.

Piano-like keyboard action lives up to the high standard set by Yamaha's top-end professional instruments.

Dual 6-watt speakers hit harder than their wattage may imply and deliver rich sound at a wide range of volume levels.

Dual mini head-phone plugs are good for duet and teaching situations.

88-key portable electric piano with built-in amplification.

PROS: High-quality, piano-like keyboard action. Patches are rich and variable enough for hobby, home, and student use. Speakers deliver strong, clean sound. Sequencer, included songs, and hand-specific muting provide valuable practicing possibilities. Intuitive and easy to use. Lightweight for an 88-key instrument. Attractive.

CONS: No 1/4" outs. RCA output level isn't adjustable. Loud playing with speakers cranked produces minor buzzing.

Yamaha,
www.yamaha.com/digitalpianos.

\$1,499

For every gigging pro keyboardist out there, there are a dozen enthusiastic, piano-centric hobbyists, talented folks who love making music for fun and need quality gear fitted for their needs. Super-blinged-out synth engines with deep tweakability down to the nano level? Um . . . maybe not. Rich-sounding samples and realistic piano action? Right on.

Aiming at such a hobbyist community, Yamaha created the P-140, a new portable digital piano with strong sounds and an impressive piano-like action. Whether you're looking to practice etudes, finish arranging that big band chart, or work out exercises for theory class, read on to see what this axe is all about.

HARDWARE

First, the aesthetics: Meant primarily for home use, the P-140 is a nice-looking piece of highly-functional furniture. The keyboard comes in two different color schemes, and both include faux-wood panels and a curvy, translucent music stand. Neither as industrial and intimidating as some 'boards, nor as ornamental as others,

VITAL STATS

POLYPHONY

64 notes.

VOICES

Grand piano x 3, piano and strings, electric piano x 3, church organ, jazz organ, strings, harpsichord, clav, vibes, piano and bass (programmable split voice).

TONAL VARIATIONS

Bright, normal, mellow.

EFFECTS

Chorus, phaser, tremolo, rotary speaker.

REVERB

Room, hall x 2, stage.

SPEAKERS

6W x 2.

SEQUENCER

Right and left tracks, roughly 11,000 notes.

AUDIO OUTPUTS

Headphone mini-jack x 2, RCA L & R with fixed output level.

MIDI CONNECTORS

In, out.

INCLUDED ACCESSORIES

Music stand, FC3 continuous damper pedal, AC power adapter.

OPTIONAL ACCESSORIES

L140 and L140S stands for P-140 & P-140S, \$150.

DIMENSIONS/WEIGHT

52-1/2" W x 5-1/2" H x 13-13/16"D; 39.2 lbs.

the P-140 looks simple, elegant, and unobtrusive. And how does it play?

According to Yamaha, the action on the P-140 is the same graded hammer action as that of the larger, louder, and more expensive P-250 stage piano. I loved the meaty feel of the P-250 and, though the P-140s action feels slightly lighter to me than that of the P-250, I still thoroughly enjoyed the grand piano-esque touch of the instrument.

Though the twin speakers on the P-140 are rated at 6 watts each, they pack a hefty punch when you turn them up, and also deliver clean, rich sound at whisper levels. There's more than enough power here for home use, as well as solo gigs and small combo shows. And if you decide to take the P-140 out with you for one of those purposes, you'll be happy to discover how light the keyboard is, especially given its action — at just under 40 lbs. for both a weighted-keyboard instrument *and* amplification, it's quite a nice all-in-one package.

SOUNDS AND PROGRAMMING

I'm a fan of Yamaha's sound design and the P-140 gave me no reason to change that opinion. The three piano tones are equal parts warm and percussive, and their rich bass rumble is reminiscent of an acoustic Yamaha C3 grand. The electric piano selections include a digital ballad-friendly tone, as well as an addictive, slightly-gritty Rhodes, and the piano/jazz bass split is another fun addition.

While its programming capabilities are decidedly basic, the P-140 does offer some useful tweakable parameters. Fine-tune the pitch or switch between equal temperament and Pythagorean scales, split the keyboard between two tones or change the soft pedal settings — it's all intuitive and user-friendly.

The touch sensitivity control deserves special mention. Click between hard, medium, soft, or a fixed velocity level and you'll notice a significant difference in how the keyboard responds to your touch. With the setting on hard, I was very happy with the dynamic range the P-140 allowed me — it reproduced everything from heavy, percussive smacks to delicate runs appropriately. This is a really nice feature to find so accessible on a home/hobbyist instrument.

IN USE

I used the P-140 to learn and practice tunes for a gig with Thud Factor (a band made up of editors from *Keyboard*, *Guitar Player*, and *Bass Player*), to help me create this month's beginner and intermediate lessons (check out pages 46 and 48), to figure out chunks of Hiromi's "Return of Kung-Fu World Champion" and transcribe them in Finale via MIDI, and just to practice and mess around in my workspace whenever I had some downtime.

For a portable product not aimed at gigging or

CLAIM CHECK

Yamaha says, "The P-140 and P-140S digital pianos are shifting the entry level P-Series towards the core customer who has been buying the majority of digital pianos for the last several years: The general consumer and music hobbyist/enthusiast looking for a portable, weighted-action instrument for the home, apartment, or dorm room. The top priority for any digital piano customer (pros, general consumers, and 'prosumers') has always been realistic piano touch and tone, which is why the P-140 includes our already-proven GHE (Graded Hammer Effect) action and the stereo AWM (Advanced Wave Memory) samples of an actual Yamaha grand piano. These are then enhanced with consumer-targeted features like RCA outputs, dual 1/8" (mini) headphone jacks and ease of operation. Any piano student (beginner or advanced) will appreciate the 50 preset piano songs of standard repertoire. Right- and left-hand parts can be muted independently for practicing, a crucial part of learning any piece."



SEQUENCING AND PRACTICING

The P-140 comes with a basic, internal two-track sequencer that can both record user performances and play back song files provided by Yamaha. And with Yamaha's free Musicsoft Downloader software, you can save your sequenced recordings to a computer and import MIDI (type 0) files into the P-140's memory. The 50 built-in songs are great educational selections, ranging from Bach inventions to Beethoven piano sonatas, Debussy's "Arabesque 1" to Scott Joplin's "Maple Leaf Rag." Since these are MIDI files, you can adjust the tempo to suit your practicing needs, loop a section on the fly (with a measure of click track before it begins again each time around) and, best of all, mute either hand so you can practice each hand separately with accompaniment. Even cooler is how the muted track can still be faintly heard in the mix, giving you a guide to help you navigate through particularly tricky parts. For both pros and amateurs, this is a great feature — who among us couldn't benefit from more time polishing a Chopin etude or three?

recording pros, the P-140 impressed me with its sound quality. Maybe it's an outdated stereotype, but when I hear the words "portable," "consumer," and "keyboard" used in the same sentence, the first thing to pop into my head is a patch list featuring sounds like Dogs Barking and Dogs Barking 2. The P-140's a different beast altogether.

Having played extensively with the Yamaha P-250 and S90 ES, I found the P-140's piano sounds didn't disappoint, even when held up to such rich (and more expensive) standards. Whether played through their internal speakers or Genelec monitors, the piano tones felt satisfying and realistic enough to keep me (acoustic piano loyalist that I am) happily jamming away. The Clav sound was also tight and funky, and inspired me to log quite a few hours practicing two-handed rhythmic figures. All the sounds are of high quality, in fact. Not that this is necessarily surprising — it's just nice that, on a keyboard with only 14 tones, none of them are throwaways.

The ability to switch reverb and tonal characteristics with separate push-button menus reminded me fondly of my old Kurzweil PC88. And it's also nice that, with the quality tones and parameters available, you can easily record ideas with a few button pushes. The two-track sequencer is simple, but gets the job done quite well. I also thoroughly enjoyed playing with the built-in songs and hope to log more practice hours on them in the future. Discovering that I could no longer remember the entire left-hand part to Bach's *Two-part Invention No. 1* was a bit of a wake-up call. . . .

Like the internal speakers on the P-250, those of the P-140 deliver rich, clean sound. Also like the P-250, they deliver more sonic firepower than their size or wattage might imply. Unlike the P-250, though, I found that the P-140 produced some minor infrastructure buzzing at the highest volumes. A little annoying, but not a terribly big deal.

The sounds, portability, and action of the keyboard were enough to make me consider taking the P-140 out for some casual gigging. For cocktail music engagements or small combo sets, for example, I could see the piano and Rhodes sounds doing a fine job, and the combination of the P-140's light weight, built-in amplification,


and strong action make it a great candidate for some categories of live performance. I never did take it to a show, though, simply because the instrument doesn't have 1/4" outs. While the RCA jacks make it easy to connect the keyboard directly to a home stereo, the ability to directly patch the P-140 into whatever via standard instrument cable was lacking.

True, it's simple enough to pick up RCA to 1/4" converters at Radio Shack or, in a pinch, you could get way with sticking a 1/4"-to-mini converter on your cable and going in through the headphone jacks. Also true that Yamaha didn't really have gigging musicians in mind when they made the P-140. That said, I was disappointed that such standard outputs weren't included, and I found that the omission limited my use of the instrument. Who knows — many a hobbyist or enthusiast may well want to lay down some piano grooves on a four-track, or see what a Clav sounds like pushed through a guitar amp or fuzz-wah pedal.

One other concern with the RCA plugs: Their volume is fixed, which means that if you have them connected to external amplification, you can't control your levels from the keyboard. While this may simplify things for music tech newbies — less sliders and parameters and such to worry about — it might limit the possibilities for those wanting to use the P-140 in a more professional setting.

CONCLUSIONS

As a portable, self-contained digital piano, the P-140 is an excellent combination of quality sound and touch. While the sounds number less than your fingers and toes combined, they're well-chosen and well-constructed, making the instrument surprisingly versatile for its class. My biggest gripe is with the lack of 1/4" outputs; this only bothers me because the rest of the instrument is so well done that, even though it's a home consumer product, I *want* to take it out with me. And if I get around to hitting Radio Shack, maybe I still will.

Regardless of your gigging desires (or lack thereof), I have no doubt that the P-140 will fill many a residence (and editor's office) with high-quality sound — and help educate its users in the process. 

Michael Gallant is in pre-production for his second book and first CD project. He's considering getting "Thud Factor 4EVA" tattooed on his left bicep.