



### Software and DSP

The Zen Tour uses Antelope's network-controllable block matrix routing software, which we've looked at previously with the Orion units and the Zen Studio. It is updated and tailored for use with the Zen Tour. It may seem a bit daunting the first time you dig in and set it up for your DAW and workflow,

## Antelope Audio Zen Tour

This sleek desktop interface packs in way more power than meets the eye

Antelope Audio has been on quite a roll. Originally Antelope gear was found primarily in high-end mastering studios with premier converters and clocks. That changed in 2014 with the launch of the Orion32, a recording interface/ converter that sent 32 channels bi-directionally to a DAW over USB 2.0 at very low latencies. In February 2016 we looked at the updated Orion 32+ with improved specs, Mac Thunderbolt connectivity, and improved onboard DSP processing. This month we are taking a look at the next evolutionary step in the company's Zen series, the Zen Tour.

We first looked at the Zen series in October 2014 with the Zen Studio. While the Orion32 and 32+ are line-level units only, the Zen Studio boasted 12 onboard XLR microphone preamps and DSP effects as part of a portable 24-channel USB 2.0 recording interface. Its new sibling, the Zen Tour, ups the Antelope game in some very significant ways. The most obvious is that The Zen Tour breaks Antelope's trend of 19" rack mount devices and is a desktop device.

### A tour of the Tour

The Zen Tour measures 10" across, 6 1/4" deep and slants upward from 1 1/8" at the front to 2" at the back. This is easily Antelope's most visually stunning design yet. It is solidly built with all-metal construction, deep black with brushed gunmetal gray aluminum trim and a full color touchscreen.

Most of its controls, navigation, and settings are handled via the touchscreen, but it also has a large detented multifunction rotary knob and pushbuttons for gain, headphone level, and engaging the onboard talkback microphone. A fourth button (labeled with an Antelope logo) adds user-definable controls as of the newest firmware, which didn't arrive in time for us to test.

### Well connected

The Zen Tour is packed with ins and outs on 3 of its 4 sides.

On the front are eight 1/4" jacks. The first two are headphone outs, the second pair are labeled R1 and R2 where the "R" stands for re-amp out. The other four inputs are labeled G1 through G4, and can be set to a choice of Hi-Z instrument input for guitars and basses or standard balanced TRS line input.

On the back are four Neutrik Combo TRS/XLR jacks for both mic and line input. Next are two sets of balanced 1/4" Monitor outs, S/PDIF I/O on RCA jacks, and finally a DB25 jack offering an additional 8 analog outputs on a TASCAM-spec D-Sub snake. The rear panel finishes out with a USB 2.0 jack, a Thunderbolt jack, and a locking socket for the 18V/25W wall wart power supply.

Last but not least, on the left side of the unit are 4 additional ADAT optical jacks for 16 channels of ADAT I/O.

but just know that more or less any input can be routed to any output or to one of 4 near-zero-latency digital mixer setups.

The onboard AFX effects are based on the company's Field Programmable Gate Array (FPGA) which focuses on realtime hardware modeling. When we reviewed the 32+ a few months back, Antelope had just launched their new AuraVerb DSP reverb. This time they have added a pair of Pultec-inspired EQs called the VEQ1P and VEQ5, an API-style EQ called the 55A, and even cooler, a BAE Audio-licensed 1073 EQ. Each of these EQs can be tracked through or mixed through, and once assigned to a channel, they can be routed anywhere you want in the matrix.

Also available in the AFX section are 8 modeled guitar amps: Top30, Darkface, Modern, Plexi 59, Rock 75, Rock 22.10 and—just released a few days ago—Tweed Deluxe and Marcus II. The names and looks more than hint at each amp's inspiration. Each model is simple to start using, but offers tweakability in the amp controls, cabinet selection, and adjustable mic selection and placement.

These amp models really sound great. The early vintage models go nicely from clean to volume-based breakup, and the modern half-stack styled amps have heavy drive and crunch for days.

Like all good DSP models, these effects do take some processing power. In my tests, between 2 and 16 instances were available depending on the effect in question. Antelope states that the number of possible simultaneous effects is being increased in an upcoming free software update, which will also feature more EQ and compressor models.

### Specs, clocks and sample rates

Most of the specs of the Zen Tour are the same as on the new Orion Studio and Goliath (review forthcoming). The mic preamps and converters spec out a touch better than the previous Orion and Zen units. I did not have the older models on hand for a side-by-side, but I thought those sounded great with nice full tone. The Zen Tour also offers clean, open, and detailed A/D and D/A conversion.

The Zen Tour makes use of the company's 4th Generation Acoustically Focused Clocking, 64-bit DDS, Oven Controlled Crystal Oscillator, the same as on all Zen and Orion units. It can record and play back sample rates from 32 up to 192 kHz, all in 24-bit resolution.

Further specs include 120 dB dynamic range on both A/D and D/A, 129 dB dynamic range on the monitoring D/A, THD+n of -110 dB on the A/D and -107 dB on the D/A, and up to 65 dB of mic preamp gain with THD+n of -108 dB. In other words, impeccably clean.

## In use

Installing software and drivers is quick and painless, but requires an internet connection for initial registration and searching for updates. Even though I was already familiar with Antelope's routing matrix, it took me a bit to re-wrap my head around it. Antelope has made it even easier to drag and drop ins and outs to your desired destinations with features like multiple channel selection and dragging, track muting, and even undo and redo functions. You can now name individual channels and destinations.

I like the fact that each of the eight analog inputs can be set to line input (or Hi-Z/Mic on four of them) so you can use the Zen Tour with outboard gear for mixdown, although I would have loved an insert or two for tracking. The only downside of a full-blown session is that if every input and output is used, D-Sub snake and all, the Zen Tour becomes quite the cluttered cable hub!

The touchscreen seems small at first but actually works wonderfully. Once you learn its flow, it's pretty quick to jump around between ins and outs and set levels. The multifunction dial is equally handy, muting selected outputs when pushed.

When switching between Monitor outs A and B, you can hear a nice hearty relay click. Although it's not built to be a full-featured monitor controller like Antelope's Satori, I am hoping that a future firmware update can add Mono and Dim functions, especially since the unit already dims when the talkback is pushed. Speaking of talkback, it works as advertised; the built-in mic on the top



panel is, like most such mics, a bit distant and echoey.

Sonically the unit is ultra-clean and quiet, from the monitor outs to the headphones and the mic pres. While I didn't have a Zen Studio to compare it with, my tests were impeccable, and I certainly didn't hear any evidence to refute Antelope's claims that the Zen Tour's pre-amps are the best yet featured in an Antelope interface. While Antelope encourages using the latest OS available, I had flawless USB and Thunderbolt performance on my three test Macs, two of which are 2011 models, one running macOS Mavericks and the others El Capitan.

## Conclusion

All in all, this is a stellar box that sets a high bar for connectivity, routing, features, and overall sound. I think the Zen Tour could be the real breakout star of the Antelope line; it covers or exceeds the needs of most modern portable and project studios, with pro-level sonic quality. ☺

**Price:** \$1495

**More from:** Antelope Audio,  
[www.antelopeaudio.com](http://www.antelopeaudio.com)