

# YAMAHA LS9 DIGITAL LIVE CONSOLE

Yamaha's new addition to its digital family has settled right in. But where does it fit in?

**Text:** Ben Burns



► Ever since the first small digital desks like the 01V appeared, Yamaha has been at the forefront of the digital revolution. Yamaha turned its digital eye on the live market with the large-format PM1D and has been rolling out more cost effective options ever since, to a seemingly insatiable market. There's the PM5D, *the* worldwide de facto monitoring console. Then there's the cheaper M7CL. Now we have the even more compact, even more price-conscious LS9. Now that we've followed the family tree, let's move on.

There are two versions of the LS9: the LS9-16, a 16 mic/line, 32-channel, rackmount version; and the LS9-32, a 32 mic/line, 64-channel version. For the purposes of this review I was given the more compact version, but apart from the frame size the two consoles are all but identical. Both squeeze features from the M7CL into a more compact package. In fact, the LS9 is perfect for any event where you need to travel light but can't compromise on processing power. Indeed, having eight FX racks built into the board is a godsend for the wide and varied tasks this board will be asked to perform.

## FEATURES

The 16 analogue inputs and eight outputs on the LS9 are all on XLRs. Similarly, the LS9-32 has 16 XLR input and output channels.

An extra layer of 16 inputs comes from the 'digital' option slot, where you can get wired up to just about any format in existence. Yamaha's mini-YGDAI digital cards include formats like MADI, ADAT, TDIF, S/PDIF and third-party support for the Aviom protocol. Wordclock in and out is provided on BNCs. MIDI in and out is supplied, as are network connections on a standard Ethernet socket.

The onboard DSP is the same as the M7CL, so you have eight virtual racks housing four FX engines with up to 8 x 32-band graphic EQs. If you require more graphics, say for a larger monitor rig, users can double the number of graphics to 16. The only drawback to this is that the equalisers are reduced to 15-bands.

One very welcome feature of the LS9 is the addition of an MP3 recorder/player, which can record directly to your USB memory stick at rates of up to 192kbps. This is a great way to create a simple board mix without having to worry about separate and sometimes bulky DAWs. Bands can come to the gig with memory sticks and leave with the show – albeit in MP3 format.

## CONTROL SURFACE

All the faders, pots and switches are the same physical components as used on the M7CL. There are 17 x 100mm motorised faders that are switchable between the two layers

of 16 inputs, the 17th fader dedicated to the L/R master bus at all times. When you want to edit a graphic EQ, all 16 faders turn into frequency selectors – a great innovation.

The layout of the LS9 series is simple and ergonomic with colour coding on the 16 mix bus buttons and other controls. The large data wheel has an obligatory thumb indent for super-fast scrolling and the cursor keys are laid out sensibly to allow intuitive, one-handed operation.

There are a number of physical rotary controls such as gain, pan, and EQ, but selections have to take place on the screen using the cursor keys and data wheel. After a few hours of using the console, the navigation became second nature.

Unlike its more expensive brethren, the LS9 doesn't have a touchscreen (the display real estate is probably too small to make a touchscreen practical). The backlit colour display nevertheless packs a lot of information into a small 110 x 140mm screen. Having said that, the screen felt cluttered in places and sometimes a line of text was hard to read because of a similar background colour. After experimentation with the contrast control the screen was more legible, but I'm not sure I'd like to rely on it on a sunny day.

One thing I always wanted to see on the M7CL were hardware high-resolution stereo meters, as opposed to software-based ones. The LS9 delivers in this department and the resolution is perfect for this board. With 32-segment LEDs you can easily see when you get to -2dB, -1dB or 0dB (clip). Of course, these meters come into their own when setting up your gain structure with the cue function.

Setting up the Windows-based Studio Manager software to externally control the desk was easy enough. With the Studio Manager software connected it's much easier to access the information you need via the computer screen. I set up a few macros to display the graphic EQs on my PC monitor which made visual feedback easier in dimly lit circumstances. The FX racks, meters and all inputs/outputs can also be read this way.

## WEDDINGS, PARTIES, ANYTHING

I took the board out for a medium-sized wedding gig to handle the usual speeches and two small bands – one a jazz and the other a Ramones cover act. The board performed exceptionally on the night and critical listening to the audio revealed ample head room, probably due in part to the fixed point processor employed. The LS9 sounds fine with inputs running at high gain and the master bus has ample headroom. The mic pres had great clarity and represented the acoustic guitars, violin, double bass, keys and trumpet well. All the instruments could be clearly manipulated in

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relation to the others – with audible results backed up on the screen with graphics and precise values for gains, Q and frequency. I liked working with the onboard compressors; they worked well with the fast bass lines and ‘violent’ melodies. There is even a multiband compressor, which I found very handy, as the room had a live ambience (RT60 was about three seconds). I inserted the multiband across the mix to tighten up the direct sound – it worked well. After a fiddly setup, the three compression bands were working away with transparent ease.

The rest of the evening went reasonably smoothly. Speeches are notoriously problematic – invariably the father of the bride will hold a mic about 12 metres from his mouth as he whispers. In preparation I routed the input signal to a number of channels, each with different gain, compression and EQ. This enabled me to quickly call up the ‘quiet sibilant female vocal’ fader to get a good sound to start from. A whole page of these ‘presets’ lets you deal with any unplanned source very quickly. The desk came into its own in this regard and even the deaf great aunt at the back heard every word of the speeches.

**HIT THE GROUND RUNNING**

I’m a big fan of Yamaha pro audio products. Indeed, live engineers the world over are confident when presented with just about any of the company’s large format consoles.

There are only two negatives about the LS9-16 – there is no socket for a desk lamp and the screen is a bit small for the information and graphics displayed. Saying that, once you get used to the way the menus work, it’s easy enough to interrogate and edit the console at speed. The price of this board will put off anyone with little understanding of digital pro audio requirements – this is a professional product that incorporates expensive DSP and sensitive components that have to stand up to life in a touring rack.

I know a few PA companies that have had LS9s for a while now, and all seem pretty happy with their overall durability.

The LS9 is a great option if you’re looking for a small-format digital desk with ample DSP and headroom. ■



**NEED TO KNOW**

**Price**  
LS9-16: \$8000; LS9-32: \$14,500

**Contact**  
Yamaha Music Australia  
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www.yamahaproaudio.com

**Pros**  
Yamaha reliability.  
Yamaha’s familiar user interface.  
Powerful and flexible.

**Cons**  
Lack of screen real estate sometimes limiting.  
No connection for external ‘little’ light on the LS9-16.

**Summary**  
Yamaha has plugged another hole in the market with a well-directed product. Ideal where space is at a premium or portability is required – all without sacrificing processing grunt. A compact, powerful package.

Here’s a sign of the times (top). The LS9 features an MP3 recorder/player, which records to your USB memory stick. You can record at rates up to 192kbps. (Above) Yamaha’s mini-YGDAI cards offer a great way of customising your I/O. Load in MADI, TDIF, Aviom or (as pictured) ADAT cards as required.