

Anthony DeMaria Labs ADL 1500

We've said it before; you can't have too many compressors and variety is the spice of gain reduction. ADL is enjoying reinvigorated exposure in Europe and **GEORGE SHILLING** says this box is a tasty, characterful bundle.



ANTHONY DEMARIA LABS has been hand-building compressors for more than 17 years and has built something of a reputation as a boutique supplier to those 'in the know' who are happy to pay a little more for something special. DeMaria's compressors are frequently namechecked by a number of great and good producers, engineers, mixers and artists, particularly Stateside, including Michael Brauer, Joe Chiccarelli and David Frangioni. Now distributed in the UK by KMR, their prices have come down to a more realistic level.

Anthony is Italian and he compares his art to that of the chef, creating something with his hands is, he says, 'like cooking a great meal for your family and friends'. He built his reputation hand-building tube gear, copying classic circuits, and soon started getting calls from big producers like Flood, Neil Dorfsman and Tchad Blake. His most extraordinary product is an expensive recreation of the classic Fairchild 670 model.

The ADL C/L 1500 (UK£1660 +VAT) is a stereo version of the mono ADL C/L 1000, the circuitry of which resembles that of the classic LA-2A. It is not claimed anywhere that this is designed as an exact clone of the LA-2A, but it uses the same principles, and many details are similar, such as the optical cell and the lack of power supply regulation. The front panel is simple and straightforward, painted plain light grey with retro bakelite-style knobs. The VU meters are large and clear, they look modern and are gently lit with a torch bulb behind each one — this illumination is the only indication of power. The tiny toggles seem slightly flimsy but work reliably. Most of the circuitry is encased, but like the LA-2A, the tubes sit outside on the back.

With eight valves present, there is quite some heat generated, so careful consideration will be needed for placement of the unit. DeMaria says he likes to gently remind clients to keep things cool so as to improve the life of the components. These tubes operate at very high voltage — up to 350V. It seems running at a suitably high voltage always helps the sound quality and character of valve gear. With the valves exposed on the back, they are somewhat vulnerable to damage, especially as the XLR audio connections for input and output are located in among them — you wouldn't want to be poking around the back of a rackmounted unit with an XLR connector in hand.

Each channel is equipped with two Russian

Sovtek 12AX7LPS (same as 12AX7A) valves, with a 12BH7A and a 6AQ5A labelled as Penta Laboratories USA. Overall build quality is excellent, the hand wiring is neat and internal layout is uncluttered — it all seems to fit easily into the 2U case. Inputs and outputs are 600ohm connections, so consideration is needed in matching your source.

Operation could not be simpler. With only two knobs, you simply set the amount of compression using the Peak Reduction knob (clockwise is more) and then correct the output level with the Gain knob. Each meter can switch independently between Gain Reduction and Output +4 level; these large clear meters are an excellent indicator of gain reduction. The other toggles select stereo linking, which joins the two channels' gain reduction circuits for a stable image, and a Power On/Off switch. The lack of a hard-wire bypass — or indeed any bypass switch — is mildly frustrating when you want to compare compressed and uncompressed programme.

There is a gradual onset of compression ratio over a 10dB knee, beyond which the signal is limited fairly hard. With a fairly fast (but not inaudible) attack, an enormous amount of gain reduction can be achieved with fairly low distortion, a trick the original LA-2A excels at. However, there is noticeably more graininess to the sound of the ADL 1500, especially under heavy compression. The LA-2A's famous two-stage release isn't really evident in the ADL, and overall the release seems much faster. I gather that the 1500 has a faster release character than the mono 1000 model for it to be more suitable for stereo bus compression. It is certainly faster than I expect from an optical compressor, and this does indeed work extremely well on most programme, even if it sounds quite unlike an LA-2A. The sound is big and harmonically rich — it definitely sounds like a proper big boy's toy.

On dynamic pop (*An oxymoron? Ed*), in most cases it has the effect of making the track sound like a record — it is sweet and comfortable sounding, naturally taming harshness and tightening up the bass end. The slightly grainy quality even adds a hint of analogue tape or vinyl record to the proceedings. You have to be careful with overly-dynamic tracks, as more than 4 or 5dB peak gain reduction can introduce audible pumping or make things sound slightly 'pinched', depending on the tempo of the track. But the ADL is good at adding excitement to a track without squashing its dimensions, the sound remains

big, and a great mix will sound exceptional.

Used on pop or rock lead vocals, the ADL adds punch, indeed the attack characteristic sometimes has a tendency to make the vocal sound too aggressive when compressed hard. This punchiness works well on real drums, taming the kit in a very appealing manner — with medium-fast attack and release, this is not over-dramatic, but just controlling and enhancing. And on bass guitar it sounds punchy yet smooth, grounding the track perfectly.

Interestingly, DeMaria is helping develop a product range for Presonus, and judging by the ADL C/L 1500 this could be very interesting. ■

PROS

Big, warm, punchy compression; simplest possible operation.

CONS

Vulnerable rear-mounted valves; crunchier and faster than an LA-2A; fixed Attack and Release; no bypass.

EXTRAS



ADL's 670 Limited Edition Stereo Valve Compressor follows years of testing and research and has matched, part for part, the specifications and control of the original Fairchild 670. Featuring 14 transformers and 20 valves it's housed in a 6U with a separate 3U valve PSU. Price is UK£10,000 (+ VAT).

Contact

ADL, US:
Website: www.anthonymarialabs.com
UK, KMR Audio: +44 208 445 2446