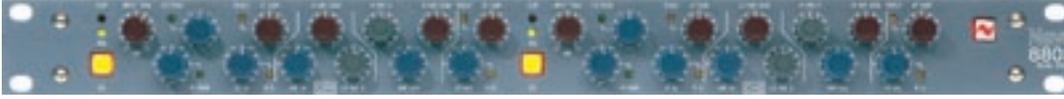


# Neve 8803 Dual EQ

Every facility needs at least one good outboard EQ and manufacturers are lining up to sell you one. **GEORGE SHILLING** reports on a dual-channel EQ with recall and even more features than its fully loaded front panel suggests.



**THE 8803 CRAMS** two channels of EQ into a single rack space, so by definition the controls are fiddly compared to vintage Neves. But miniaturisation is ever-popular; even Rupert himself now markets a single 5-band EQ crammed into a half rack box but his Portico 5033 has slightly better knob spacing. The 8803 (UK£1250 + VAT) features comprehensive 4-band EQ plus high and low filtering. The case is fairly shallow, and while the colour scheme is very Neve, the build quality is not quite as reassuring as chunky 1073s and 1081s.

The EQ is based on a 'classic' Neve design, the 8108. These were late-1970s era consoles that were never as popular as older Neves but it seems this was mainly due to a poorly designed centre section. The rear includes Combi-type sockets for XLR or jack input and separate XLR and jack output sockets. The power supply is an external lump-in-the-line, with a worryingly flimsy 8-pin DIN connection that is oddly sunk, upside-down, behind the rear panel; seemingly something of a bodge.

Also on the rear — and this is interesting — is a B-type USB socket. This connects to a Mac or PC for storage and recall of settings. The manual on the CD-ROM was less than helpful regarding this feature, as it simply suggested visiting the downloads page on the Neve website to acquire the Recall Manual. The recall software eventually worked very elegantly on my Mac, much like Neve's large console recall software. Upon loading a previously saved setting, a smart, clear graphic appears and it is simply a matter of twiddling the knobs until everything matches.

The front panel power button lights up with a delightful red vintage N logo, although it feels slightly crunchy. The two channels are laid out logically side-by-side. First you get useful Clip and Signal LEDs and this is plenty enough level information for confidence checking while adjusting. Clip comes on at 25dBu and headroom is usually adequate, although with modern DAW levels overload is certainly possible with big boosts. The EQ turns out to be exceptionally warm and sweet so you may be tempted to turn the knobs to extremes. An Input Trim provides gain from -20dB to +20dB, allowing matching of hot +4dBu signals or weak -10dBV sources, this is a continuous centre-détented pot.

Sensible colour coding has been used for knobs, dark blue ones adjust frequency, grey is Q for the mid bands, and dark red covers gain controls. All very logical, except that the two mid-bands are arranged differently from each other in order to cram everything in.

Some of the 8803's knobs have a 'hidden' push-push function. Hi and Lo Pass filters are enabled by a push on their frequency knob, independent of the main EQ On buttons that are large and light up in yellow. The filters cover 30-300Hz and 1.5-18kHz respectively, there are a few numerical indications around the knobs and these are very small. The filters are 12dB per octave and are nicely progressive, sounding much as you would expect them to. The wide-ranging Low and High Frequency EQ bands include a few clever

features, despite just two knobs. Pushing the Gain knobs changes the mode between Bell and Shelf. In Bell mode, Q can be set to 0.7 or 1.8 by pushing the Frequency knob. In Shelf mode this switches between Normal and Resonant mode, adding an extra boost around the corner frequency (or a cut when cutting). It sounds great, but one minor irritation is that it is easy to accidentally push these knobs while adjusting.

The two mid bands are conventional three-knob parametrics. These are lovely and silky, the low-mid has the potential to sound like the world's smoothest wah-wah pedal at the narrowest Q setting, and these bands excel with wide ranges for general sound-shaping.

The sound of this unit is smooth and forgiving, and it certainly has a 'Neve' character with a richness and warmth of tone. At full tilt, each band boosts or cuts a claimed 18dB, but you'd never guess it was as much as that from listening. It's a subtle difference, but I did not sense quite as much of the low-end glow here that is achievable on RND's 5033. However, at the top end, boosting extreme high end on female vocals the 8803 was marginally smoother than the 5033, more open, less squeezed, and the extra power of 18dB boost (as opposed to 12dB on the 5033) was occasionally useful. The knobs are nicely damped and scaled, tweaking is enjoyable, although even with my small fingers I wished for larger knobs and bigger spaces between them.

With such tiny knobs, it is difficult to exactly match the channels when working in stereo. Indeed, when recalling settings it is often easier to see when channels are not quite matched from the screen representation rather than from the front panel. However, saving and recalling settings just to match the channels is a rather tedious method of working, although in a critical situation this might be worthwhile. Some might miss the fixed frequencies of ancient Neve designs. But the flexibility is useful, and with plenty of range on all knobs, this is amply provided.

Every studio should have one decent analogue stereo EQ and this Neve more than fits the bill, providing comprehensive facilities, with 'character' rather than surgical precision, and the bonus of recallability. It's vastly cheaper than comparable units and although there are small niggles, this case full of ICs and a lack of transformers sounds almost as expensive. ■

## PROS

Very smooth Neve sound; good flexibility with wide frequency ranges; excellent recall software for Mac or PC.

## CONS

Precision set-up requires use of the recall software; closely-spaced knobs make it easy to accidentally push the push-knob pot switches; mains adaptor connection lacks robustness.

## Contact

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