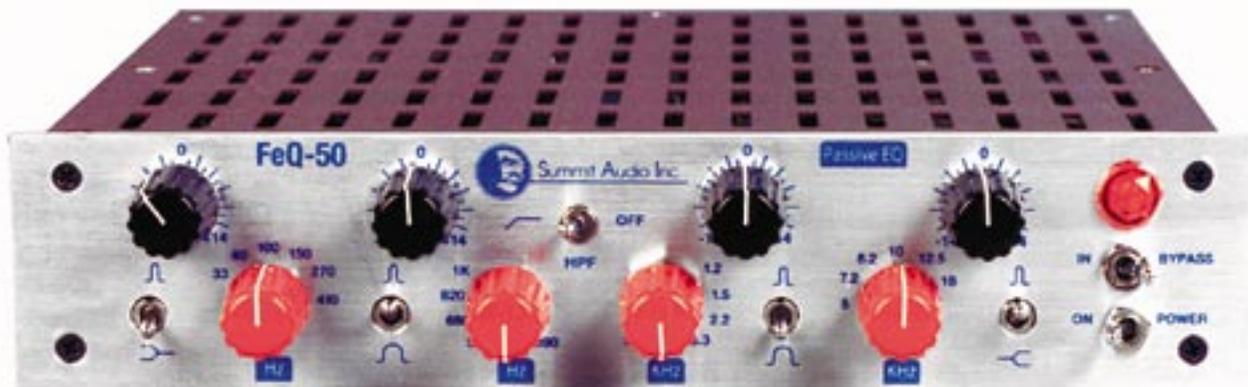


Summit Audio FeQ-50

A new product from Summit is always of interest and this passive equaliser sports some fine features and an iron-based constitution.

TERRY NELSON finds he needs very little persuading.



THE FEQ-50 IS THE latest addition to the half-rack series from Summit, with the chassis very much in the same style as its predecessors while still managing an uncluttered layout in spite of quite a high control density.

The unit (US\$995) features four EQ bands, with a top row of four black level controls (+/-14dB) and a bottom row of four staggered 6-position rotary switches with typically Summit-style red knobs. Each rotary switch also has an associated miniature toggle switch for peaking or shelving operation in the high and low bands and two Q settings for the two mid bands.

The front panel is completed by a high-pass filter toggle switch situated in the centre between the gain controls and a vertical group to the top right of the chassis that houses the red power On indicator and power toggle switch and an EQ In/Bypass toggle. These controls line up with those of the other half-rack modules, which means that they look very tidy when stacked vertically.

The rear panel has an IEC mains socket with fuse; two output sections, each with XLR and TRS jack connectors, and a Neutrik Combi input for XLR and TRS jack.

The FeQ-50 circuitry features a discrete transistor input stage and buffered solid state and tube output channels, together with balanced +4dB and -10dB outputs for a total of four separate outputs from the one unit. This flexibility means that the equaliser can be used as an active splitter and level interface before getting into the EQ functions.

The fact that the unit can be used as a line amplifier, i.e. the circuitry is active in bypass mode, encouraged me to see what effect could be obtained by just running signal through it without any further processing. The results were astonishing, to say the least.

The test set-up consisted of a CD player feeding a stereo channel of a Neotek Elite console set to mono and routed to a multitrack bus to feed the FeQ-50. The two outputs of the latter were patched into the line inputs of two channels on the console to enable A/B comparisons. The source material included my trusty Sound Check 2 test CD, which features raw tracks of vocals, instruments, ensembles and final mixes; great for testing and setting up equipment.

Even though levels were carefully set up on the metering, the subjective response of the solid state output of the Summit was such that it seemed a bit

louder than the tube output. However, I soon put this down to the fact that the solid state signal seemed to be more 'upfront' than the tube output, which, to my ears, had a more natural and rounded response. Great, two signals for the price of one!

I went through all the CD test tracks and found an interesting variety of different responses. Which response is better is down to personal taste but the tube output definitely smoothes out tracks that could be considered to be a bit aggressive or lacking in depth — it also felt more musical. The solid state output puts things very much 'in your face', which could be helpful for making tracks pop out in a mix when applying more level is not the solution. That said, the real icing on the cake is combining the two outputs — talk about pseudo stereo and all stations in between: the spread and depth of the signal has to be heard to be believed.

The EQ characteristics are those of a passive LC resonant circuit, which Summit claims provides good phase coherence, low transient intermodulation distortion and a musical harmonic structure, so let's switch in the sections and see what happens.

The low and high bands have peaking or shelving characteristics and six switched frequencies at 33Hz, 60Hz, 100Hz, 150Hz, 270Hz, and 410Hz and 5kHz, 7.2kHz, 8.2kHz, 10kHz, 12.5kHz, and 18kHz respectively. The low and mid bands have switched Q settings of just under 2 octaves and just over 3 octaves and switched frequencies at 390Hz, 470Hz, 580Hz, 680Hz, 820Hz, and 1kHz and 1.2kHz, 1.5kHz, 2.2kHz, 3.3kHz, 4.7kHz and 5.6kHz respectively.

All of the centre frequencies in the LF band were found to be useful and it could be said that the peaking response adds focus whereas the shelving adds depth or removes mud and unwanted content. In the LMF and HMF both of the Q settings are quite broad but the tighter Q is definitely more 'surgical', whereas the wide response tends to expand the signal. The HF band was found to be very dependent on the programme material when choosing the centre frequency. When harmonics are present, the upper ranges of 12.5kHz and 18kHz can add a lot of 'air' and open up the response, particularly in shelving mode. As with the LF band, peaking mode provides a 'focus' function.

The 30Hz high-pass filter has a 6dB slope and is subtle but effective, cleaning up vocal and instrumental signals very nicely without removing essential LF content. It also provides a useful 'hinge' effect when

used in conjunction with boosting of the lower ranges of the LF band.

At this point it should be mentioned that it is easy to overdo it — this seems to be a quality of all good equalisers — and you need to compare EQ in/out to realise the extent of the modifications.

The FeQ-50 provides two very different responses for the price of one; the solid state and tube outputs are that different. Subjectively, the tube output has more depth and what I can only describe as the Summit 'halo' around the sound.

Switching to bypass after setting an EQ definitely makes you feel that something is lacking and use of the unit on live male and female voice showed that a lot of sound tailoring is possible. I even used it on two piano tracks that could be best described as 'nasty' and the FeQ-50 saved the day and proved itself to be a vital tool to restoring musicality. Compliments to the chef on this one! ■

PROS

Lots of flexibility; sounds great; high value for money; completes a 'channel strip' for the half-rack series.

CONS

No in/out switches for individual bands; I will have to buy one; you will want multiple units!

EXTRAS

Other half-rack format Summit units include the TLA-50 tube levelling amplifier, the 2BA-221 mic and line module, and the TD-100 instrument preamp and tube direct box.



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