

TFPro P9

TFPro is offering a new range of outboard equipment options. **GEORGE SHILLING** discovers rich analogue warmth for tracking and mastering.



ALTHOUGH THERE ARE more expensive rivals, this new dual channel mastering EQ is certainly priced in the pro bracket when compared to other outboard studio EQs. However, you pay extra for mastering versions with switched knobs, and the P9 (UK£1750 + VAT) employs these throughout. The house style is two-tone blue, using similar knobs to those found on Manley gear. Although the knobs are obviously quality components, having 24 of them packed tightly into 2U seems slightly disproportionate and makes the unit appear cluttered. That said, the labelling and legending is clear and, impressively, its designer Ted Fletcher also squeezes in 14 toggle switches and a pair of 8-segment LED meters, plus — generously — two power On LEDs!

The rear panel includes inputs and outputs on XLRs, plus a bonus pair of TRS jack outputs 6dB down on the main outs, perhaps useful for supplying external zero-latency monitoring when recording direct to DAW through the unit.

The two channels each feature four EQ bands, high and low pass filters, and input and output Level controls. Each EQ band provides four fixed frequencies, and each associated gain knob uses a toggle switch to select Lift or Cut. Unfortunately there is no bypass for each band — perhaps a middle position on the toggle switch would have usefully provided this. I did discover a workaround though: when setting the frequency of a particular band, it is possible to lodge the knob between frequencies, at which point the band is bypassed.

However, I also found a problem with the lowest frequency band on each channel. The in-between positions on this band caused a full-band boost of around 8dB — a potential irritation if you are monitoring loud. This was pointed out to the designer during the course of the review, and was acknowledged as a minor problem that will be remedied on future production models.

For the EQ bands, Ted has based his design on the late Barry Porter's Trident A-Range EQ. These were simple designs, all-discrete Class A, but with only just enough open-loop gain to work sensibly, according to Ted. Thus, if you push an A-Range gain stage, they soon go into 2nd order distortion — perhaps the reason these old consoles are so loved by some.

The P9 employs more elegant 'constant current' transformer balanced loads for the front ends improving linearity at high levels and avoiding extremes of distortion, but retaining the tendency towards 2nd order distortion. To this end, separate input and output Gain knobs allow variable drive through the unit. These gain stages remain in circuit whether or not the EQ is in.



Also featured are high and low pass filters that stay in circuit when the EQ is bypassed — this is sometimes slightly inconvenient. The filters are set at 25, 50 and 100Hz, and 15k, 12k and 8kHz respectively; the first two positions of each are usefully subtle. This is desirable, as aggressive filters are rarely helpful in mastering.

Each band's boost/cut knob uses an extended scale at the lower end, so half-dB steps take you to 2dB, then 1dB steps go up to 8dB, and the final position is 12dB boost or cut. This low-level precision is most welcome as the Q seems fairly broad. Small amounts of boost (or cut) are more obvious than one might expect. Midrange boosting has a warm, sweet and rich effect. The two mid bands boast a toggle to select wide or narrow curves. Wide seems, well, fairly wide. And even when switched to narrow, the perceived effect is not surgical, rather there is still a broad change going on, albeit with a pointy narrow peak on the top at the chosen frequency. The Low Mid band's four frequencies range from 450Hz to 2kHz and I thought the low mid should extend a little lower.

With some juggling using the low band and the high pass filter, the desired effect can usually be achieved, but not always. Across one mix I found reducing 450Hz affected the vocals too much, when what I wanted was to take some of the boom and 'clogginess' out of the bass and instruments while enhancing the very low end. The Hi Mid's lowest frequency is 2.8kHz, so the Lo Mid band is in demand also for its 1.2kHz boost, a small amount of which adds a nice touch of 'analogue'. The High shelving has such power available to it that you are in danger of emphasising harshness with the lower pair of frequencies (8k and 10kHz), but slightly boosting either of the upper pair (12k and 15kHz) can sound like a blanket being removed from the tweeters. The low end shelving band is a simple Baxandall filter with a corner frequency from 40Hz up to 250Hz, with 75Hz and 125Hz in between. This can add enormous warmth and weight, with the low filter keeping things in check if necessary — even at 25Hz this tightens the bottom end nicely.

When looking for outboard EQ, the choice is

smaller than with compressors, so a unit like this is most welcome. However, the broad swathes and perhaps excessive power of tone change available seem slightly at odds with the apparent precision of the controls. On the plus side, the P9 can sound rich and warm, with gentle boosts and cuts. Crank any band past 2dB and some frequencies can sound somewhat aggressive and this makes it powerful for tracking applications, such as guitar EQ, although it lacks the incisive precision for rescue jobs and surgery. Nevertheless, it sounds big and, used subtly, the P9 adds a rich analogue warmth and tone for tracking and mastering. ■

PROS

Characterful EQ; easy to make subtle and/or broad changes; recallable settings.

CONS

No separate band bypasses; no output level fine trims; level controls and filters active in EQ bypass; a few more frequencies would be welcome; all knobs the same colour and size; 'Mastering' price!

EXTRAS

The TFPro range also includes the P38 VCA/optical stereo mastering



compressor, the M16 16-channel transformer based mic/line preamp, which can also be used as a 16:2 summing mixer with individual gain and pan controls, and the P10 Mighty Twin dual mono channel path mic/line/DI input stage with VCA/optical compressor and 4-band EQ.

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