

Universal Audio UAD-1 Project Pak

It's one of the fastest and most immediate ways of adding performance and variety to your workstation's processing palette and it now comes with extra options and tweaks. **GEORGE SHILLING** searches for a little extra horsepower and finds definitive plug-in compression.

PREVIOUSLY DISTRIBUTED BY MACKIE, the UAD-1 PCI processor card is now handled alongside the rest of the Universal Audio range by its distributors (SCV in the UK, for example). Although the hardware is unchanged, additions are continually being made to the range of plugs accompanying the card, and the software has just been tweaked for better G5 compatibility. The card comes bundled either as the Project Pak (UK£340 + VAT) with a large bundle of plugs, or as the Studio Pak which includes a premium bunch, each of which can be purchased separately by Project Pak owners — they can be trialled for free for 14 days.

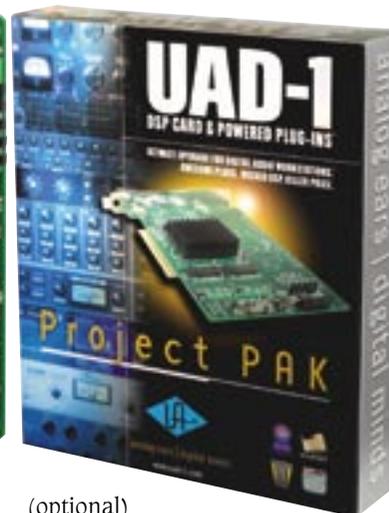
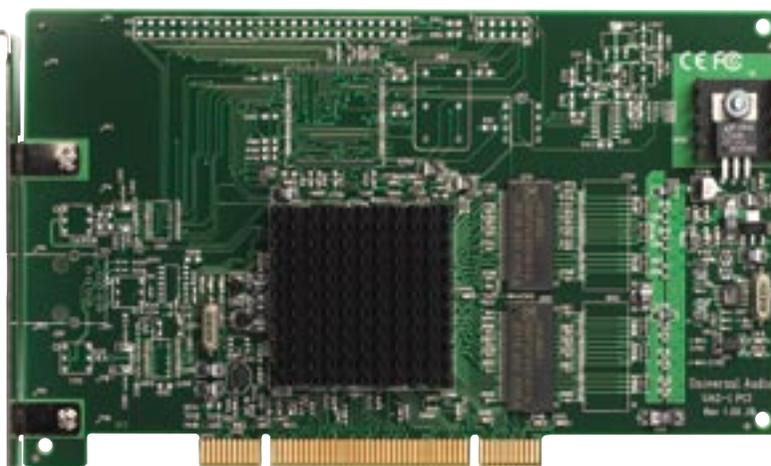
My attention was particularly drawn to additional claims of RTAS support for Pro Tools users (as well as AU, VST and MAS). Both Paks now bundle FXpansion's VST to RTAS wrapper in a version that works only with the UA plugs.

Installation is straightforward — load the software from the CD then pop the card in a spare PCI slot. For RTAS support you must also run the FXpansion software, which quickly detects and converts the VST versions. A small application, the UAD-1 Meter is available for configuring all aspects of the card, managing authorisations, showing card processor usage, and so on. Up to four cards can be run simultaneously on the same system.

On launching Pro Tools 6.4 you find the UA plug-ins all collected in the 'Other' folder rather than categorised into the correct folders, and names all are prefixed with VSTW (the W presumably standing for Wrapped or Wrapper). However, apart from these very minor irritations, the wrapper works seamlessly with an additional bar appearing at the bottom of the plug's window for loading (but not saving) VST presets. This does not stop you saving and loading RTAS settings, although the Compare button stays greyed-out. Automation of all parameters is also available, although parameter values simply seem to be displayed on a scale of 0 to 1000 rather than the actual value — not a problem.

In Logic using the Audio Units versions, things were not quite so simple. Soon after instantiating a UA plug the Core Audio would fall silent. However, this was very rapidly traced by UA technical support to a PCI bus sharing problem with the Digidesign hardware, and simply changing a setting in the UAD-1 Meter configuration resolved it. Presumably the problem doesn't occur in Pro Tools because the software addresses the Digidesign hardware directly (no Core Audio). Having resolved that, everything ran smoothly, again with full automation function and preset loading, with saving available using Logic's built-in functions.

So what of the plugs themselves? These cover all types of processor. Included in the Project Pak are about 15 different plug-ins. However, some of these are sections or cut-downs of others. Emulation of the 1176 is available as the 1176SE. The Studio Pak or optional upgrade 1176LN is a more accurate (and CPU-hungry)



rendition of the hardware original when pushed to extreme settings — the LN uses considerably more processing power. But it has a more juicy sound when you push all the ratio buttons in. And you have to turn up the input much further on the SE for that kind of needle-bending. Unfortunately LN and SE presets are not interchangeable.

Using a fairly heavy amount of processing, the Studio Pak/optional Fairchild 670 is absolutely terrific. This is stunning, sounding more gorgeous and juicy than should be expected of a plug-in. I'm not often a fan of plug-in compressors (*We've gathered that, Ed*) — this type of processing is still something usually better handled by analogue hardware units. However, this truly brought a glow to the sound of mixes and individual instruments, and especially drums. Vocals sounded lovely and warm through it, and all aspects have been carefully modelled on a real 'golden' unit, including the bias and Lat/Vert settings. If I was to buy only one of the plug-ins over and above the basic Project Pak, this would easily be the one I would go for (and I might just do that!).

A Pultec EQP-1A sounds sweet, and the Studio Pak bolts on the MEQ-5 midrange EQ section. The LA-2A emulation is also an optional extra, but sounds as big and warm and forgiving as you might expect. One major star of the show is Nigel, a CPU-hogging (you can only run two of these) guitar rig along the lines of McDSP's Chrome Tone, with multiple Amp and Cab settings enabling two separate morphable amps for emulating a couple of different guitar amps, along with a whole host of FX-pedal type modules, some of which are available as separate plug-ins. The Phasor is particularly luscious, but you also get Gate, Compressor, Mod Filter, Trem/Fade, Mod Delay and Echo, all of which are very good indeed. Each includes On buttons and all the expected controls, with plenty of knobs with accompanying direct parameter windows, and drop-down lists galore. It sounds great.

Reaverb Pro has been around for a while but is still a terrific reverb plug-in, and Dreamverb is its (optional extra) big brother, with a huge range of luscious and rich reverb settings. Reflector provides simpler reverberation, and the wonderfully rich EMT-

emulating (optional) Plate 140 appeared during the course of the review. There are further limiters, compressors and EQs, plus the optional Cambridge EQ providing a lovely big graph display where you can grab nodes for precise and high quality tweaking. The last optional plug is the Precision Limiter for mastering duties. Delay compensation plug-ins are also provided, although Logic handled this perfectly well on its own.

The reassurance of the UA name is borne out by this very attractive package.

You could easily spend the price of the basic Project Pak on one or two rival plugs without acquiring the tremendously beneficial processing power of the UAD-1 card. Although the additional plugs of the Studio Pak require considerably more outlay, they are mostly worth the expense — especially in the case of the superb Fairchild. ■

PROS	Extra processing Oomph for Native-based systems; high quality effects; Fairchild is fab!
CONS	No AudioSuite versions.
EXTRAS	 <p>Universal Audio's 8110 and 4110 multichannel mic preamps feature Class A, all discrete designs with dual stage level controls and 3-way 'shape' switching on every channel for a versatile tonal palette.</p>

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