



Softube Weiss DS1-MK3

PIPER PAYNE evaluates the software clone of a digital hardware legend

Mastering engineers are the gatekeepers for the overall technical quality of the album in the quality control process to prepare an album for manufacturing. The mastering room, the engineer's training, and the speakers are usually what gets mentioned first. But also as important are the analogue and digital tools at the engineer's fingertips.

The original (1998 TEC award-winning) DS1-MK3 digital compressor, de-esser, and limiter was a revolutionary hardware tool — the ultimate intersection of analogue and digital greatness. It has been raved about for years and is the standard to which all digital mastering plugins and digital hardware are compared. I don't know a single established mastering engineer who hasn't owned one of these — so how does it compare, and what's better about it being in plugin form?

My first interaction with the DS1 was as an assistant at a mastering studio. I had heard many times that full analogue outboard processing would result in the best sound, so when I started during the DS1, I had a bit of a shock. It was an incredibly useful tool that sounded great! The DS1 became MK2 and then the MK3 and got even better with each upgrade. Daniel Weiss is known for his curiosity and forward thinking style of innovation. With the DS1-MK3, Weiss Engineering made a tool set that was focused on quality and flexibility in a way that no other company has been able to make.

So here we are, on the 20th anniversary of the DS1's TEC Award — is the original hardware useful to the modern mastering engineer? The original hardware (currently selling for \$9,000 for a used unit) is limited to the AES constraints of the day it was developed. It will process the

sampling frequency of the input signal, clocked on the AES up to 96kHz, 24-bit. This is inferior now to the sampling rates we use most days, above 96kHz and often processing 32-bit audio. That's the only reason I'm not using the hardware version anymore.

Up to 192kHz 32 bit resolution

So when I heard about this new plug-in, I was intrigued. It improves on that original limitation with up to 192kHz 32-bit resolution (with 40-bit internal processing) and has wonderful new features that show Softube and Weiss are updating to our modern workflow — such as new limiters and a clickable screen to supplement the old knob turning — even including the MM1, a mastering maximizer, which is a stripped down version of the plug-in (like an L2), running DS1 in the background for less CPU burden.

This plug-in sounds better than I remember the hardware. It's incredible that the sound stage and easy feeling of the DS1 could be improved but this does it, even though it's a part of the original Weiss code. Perhaps it's the fact that the plug-in isn't bottlenecked by the 24-bit AES IO. I've driven the plug-in version with a loud master and it did not sound like it was breaking up, even though I was clipping the limiter intentionally. Most other software compressors I've tried out have audibly clipped with nasty artefacts. This is proving to be as useful to my workflow as the Pro-C by FabFilter. Definitely not a one-trick kind of tool.

The plug-in includes the useful Bob Katz presets as a place to start, and a new preset and snapshot manager. Even if you own the original hardware, I am sure you will find the plug-in surprisingly helpful and easy to add to the



modern mastering workflow, including the long-applauded DS1 parallel option, which is a must-have for any engineer, along with the easy to implement MS workflow to bring out detail in the centre or sides independently. The plug-in even has a waveform display that helps to show the transients and envelope control.



It's easy to install and just requires an iLok account. The new user just needs a Softube account and can download the installer which includes AU, VST, VST-3, and AAX versions. For folks new to the DS-1 user interface and workflow on the original hardware, I suggest taking a look at the hardware DS1 manual, which is still easily found and helpful for perspective while using the software version.

This is a game-changer for the world of classic gear plug-in emulations. The best part: now you can have as many DS1's as your session needs! Jokes aside, I can't wait for the EQ1 plug-in. [f](#)

resolution/VERDICT

PROS My favourite thing about the new plug-in is the ability to click on the parameters in the 'screen' and make adjustments, where in the original hardware the user had to navigate with the knobs. Another pro is the two additional limiter styles, adding RMS and True Peak limiting to the original DS1 limiter, helpful for dealing with the modern style of loud mixing.

CONS This plugin aligns with the Weiss style of 'we've thought of everything!' but the screen real estate that this plug-in takes up is sometimes hard to deal with. Hopefully an update will help with this, or the plug-in can transform into an even better DS1 GUI experience.

EXTRAS The Weiss MM1 Maximizer (\$199) and DEES (\$179) are included as a bundle with the purchase of the DS1-MK3 (\$549).

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