



SSL Fusion

ADRIAN HALL jazzes up his mix with some fusion

The Fusion is a new processing unit from console giants SSL, described as a “stereo analogue colour” box and conceived primarily for mix buss use. It’s a ground-up concept, incorporating five main processing blocks that are all new designs, a result of development by SSL in conjunction with a small group of mixing and mastering.

The pots are not stepped, but most have a useful centre detent, and there is plenty of clear legending on the panel to facilitate easy recalls. A row of soft-switch buttons runs across the bottom, to enable each section to be individually bypassed. To the right are a couple of extra switches for the insert points to be switched in and pre/post EQ, and a master bypass. The signal flow is from left to right across the front panel and starts with an input trim of +/-12dB, followed by an 18dB/octave HP filter with cut-off frequencies at 30, 40 and 50Hz.

The first new processor, the ‘Vintage Drive’, has just two knobs, Drive and Density. The Drive control does pretty much what you’d expect, and this knob goes to 11 (of course!). Density is a little bit less intuitive, adding primarily even-order harmonics at lower settings, but as you increase Density, more odd-order harmonics get added. At low Density settings, Drive seems to add more transient and punch to a signal, whereas at higher settings there is more of the saturation and smoothing effect that comes with lightly overdriven circuitry.

At moderate settings of Drive and with higher Density settings, the effect is very similar to pushing a console into its sweet spot, with a gentle saturation that really glues a mix together. Things can get pretty ‘hairy’ with high

Drive and Density settings: less than you’d get with a dedicated distortion unit like a Culture Vulture, certainly more than you’d want across a mix buss, but great for processing individual parts or stems.

25 years for an SSL analogue EQ

The Violet EQ section comes next and is a pair of high and low shelving EQs, with a new minimum phase-shift design. There are four fixed frequencies for each shelf, and the pot allows for +/-9dB of gain. The low shelf adds heft and weight to the signal, and is particularly powerful when used in conjunction with the HPF before it. The high shelf is soft and open at the top end, and because the shelf is so smooth, actually lifts frequencies much lower than the selected frequency would indicate.

Next is the very intriguing HF Compressor section, controlled by two knobs, one for adjusting the threshold of the compressor and the other for selecting the crossover frequency at which the compressor will start to act. The idea was to emulate the effect of tape-like reduction of harsh or brittle high frequencies, and the fact that it follows the EQ section means that you can add brightness but catch any harsh high frequency peaks with the HF Compressor. This can be fairly subtle, just helping to tame and slightly soften a mix, or when abused, can really low-pass the signal in a very musical way, making it sound like you’ve printed your mix to an old cassette tape, albeit one that keeps the low end punch!

The Stereo Image processor is an analogue M/S processor, featuring Space and Width

controls. Width, is actually more familiar to most users, and simply increases the level of the Side component of the M/S signal. The Space control is a bit more unusual and is actually a low frequency boost of the Side signal, using the ‘frequency shuffling’ technique originally designed by Alan Blumlein. Adding too much Space does bring a lot of low-mid to the signal, since you are EQ-ing the Side signal, and SSL recommends caution with this across a mix, but it sounds great when used on individual stems, and I found it particularly good for synths or backing vocals.

Subtle colours

A new SSL transformer is the last processing block in the chain, designed to add a small amount of low frequency saturation and high-frequency sheen to the signal. There is no level control for this, so it’s a simple “better or not” choice when inserted into the signal. It’s a subtle colour but very addictive, less thumpy and more refined than a Neve-style transformer, and I almost always preferred it switched in.

Finally, a pair of buttons allow the insert points to be switched in, pre or post EQ. Interestingly, if you hold down the Insert button, it switches the insert into M/S mode, so that any dual mono EQ or compressor used on the insert can be made to work in an M/S fashion.

The Fusion is a very powerful mix buss processor, and it’s almost impossible to make it sound bad! Every mix I’ve done since receiving the unit has the Fusion across it. There is a very musical warmth and class to the sound that is very seductive. With a new manufacturing base in China, SSL have managed to keep the price point down to a minimum without sacrificing quality of sound or build, and at just below £1,800 retail, I’m sure a lot of studios will be very interested. 📌



/ Holding down the Insert button switches the insert point to M/S mode

resolution/VERDICT

- PROS** Great sounding mix buss shaper. Each processing section can be individually bypassed. Easily recallable. Relatively low cost for SSL quality sound and build.
- CONS** Space control in Stereo Image module is quite heavy handed.

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