

PSP Audioware oldTimer \$99

Format PC/Mac, AU/VST/RTAS
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PSP bring us another stunning-sounding plug-in, this time in the form of a vintage-style compressor. It's not based on any specific piece of hardware, but rather is designed to capture the general sound and characteristics of certain types of old-style compressor. As a result, the controls are very basic indeed, making it much easier to make compress drums and other sounds without getting bogged down in endless tweaking.

So, about those controls, and first up is Ratio, which offers seven settings ranging from 1.2:1 to 10:1 and can take the effect from gentle levelling to full on pumping/squashing. At the higher settings, some sound-colouration takes place, but it is often quite pleasing to the ear. On a similar note, there's a simple three-way switch offering Valve (so nicely rounded) sound, Clear (more transparent) and Off (bypass) modes.

The self-explanatory Time gives one-knob control over attack and release times, with the values slowing as the dial is cranked, going from fast percussive settings right up to slow levelling settings.

Next is Compression, which lowers the threshold level as it's increased, resulting in more compression being applied. Finally, there's a master Output knob that offers up to 30dB of makeup gain, which should be plenty!

All of this is great on paper, but how does it sound in use? Well, we tried oldTimer on a variety of sound sources, and while it's by no means a universal tool, it can generate excellent and even unique results on the right material. Examples of this include hats that need thickening, any single hits, drums or sound effects, or slapped right across your lead synth riff. You can drive the plug-in hard, to get a warm rounded sound, or use it subtly, to smooth over

rough edges.

With a healthy selection of presets to get you started and the kind of stunning sound that we've come to expect from PSP Audioware, we can say with absolute conviction that this is an essential plug-in.

10/10



Universal Audio Neve 31102 \$249

Format UAD/UAD-2, VST/AU/RTAS
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The latest EQ to hit the UAD platform is the Neve-endorsed model of the 31102 EQ module originally found in the Neve 8068 console. It's been used in the production of a lot of American rock bands - such as Guns N' Roses, Metallica and the Red Hot Chili Peppers - for its bite and edginess, and although it's not as well known as its stablemates the 1073 and 1081, it stands beside them sonically.

There are just three bands of active EQ plus low- and high-pass filters, and the plug-in window is oriented horizontally, as if racked up - if you're used to the vertical console style, it feels wrong initially, but you soon get used to it. A vertical option would've been neat, though!

The top and bottom bands are shelving filters with three and four selectable frequency points respectively. It's great to hear the smooth sound of the top end as you increase the boost at 10 or 12kHz - it's airy and glistening, with no hint of the harsh grittiness that's found on a lot of digital EQs. The warmth and weight of the bottom end is full, fat and creamy.



The mid-band bell curve is where the character of the unit lies. A quick boost on a drum kit at the 3.2 or 4.8kHz centre frequencies is enough to tell you why rock bands like it. It really bites in and cuts through without leaving the sound thin. A narrower Q setting on the mid-band allows for tighter, more precise control. And taking out mid-range woodiness at 700 or 350Hz opens the sound up majestically.

Interestingly, even with the EQ processing switched out, the sound is coloured slightly, just like the real thing - engineers have always

known that just running a signal through Neve gear makes it sound richer before you've even touched the controls. Finally, you also get an SE version that's less hungry on the DSP, at the expense of accuracy/authenticity.

Whether you really need this plug-in will depend on what you've already got in your EQ locker, and while it's not a must-have, it certainly lives up to UA's consistently high standards and will be of particular interest to those who covet the Neve sound.

8/10