

# Daking Mic pre/EQ

Following on from his look at Daking's compressor in the last issue, **GEORGE SHILLING** steps up to a recording channel from the firm and is suitably taken by the results.



**G**EOFFREY DAKING AIMS to produce high quality gear from the best of British and American outboard designs. He has made a careful study of what makes these classics great by peering into the circuitry of API, Neve and particularly Trident consoles and taking the best of the old, but using modern manufacturing techniques to provide reliable designs. Daking rejects the fad for valves, pointing out that most great consoles are solid state designs. While valves are out, transformers are in for this mic pre — all the greats had a transformer for the mic input, and this Daking is no exception. Another costly choice is to use discrete Class A components rather than ICs, again for sonic reasons. It seems that no corners have been cut here — Daking says that many audio 'improvements' over the last few years were 'vapour, just changes disguised as improvements so that equipment could be made cheaper'. (*I don't know about vapour, more like solids. Ed*).

This updated model is called the 52270B, the B representing the fact that a few changes have been made since the original units were released in the early 1990s. A beautifully constructed stainless steel encased box contains the electronics, with a polycarbonate finish on the front that protects the silk screen-printed legending. However, this can be very hard to read in low light — there is just not enough contrast between the lettering and background colours.

Also on the front are the in-house designed aluminium machined knobs, which seem more smoothly finished than I remember on the old models. The housing behind the front panel is similar in size to a Neve module, and is braced against the front with unusual slanted steel brackets. The old version used dual concentric knobs for the EQ but the separate ones are a definite improvement, much less fiddly. This change was foisted on Daking when their previous supplier of pots was taken over and prices increased. The new parts are generic, but seem none the worse for that.

A weighty separate power supply unit powers up to four units and connects via a 25-pin D-connector lead, which seems like overkill to me, but the cable screws on securely at both ends so won't fall out. There are no clues from the front panel that power is on — there is no power switch on the unit itself, no power lights, and not even a light next to the rocker switch on the power supply. However, you can hear the relays click, and the Mute and Bypass buttons illuminate when pressed in. Having a Mute button on an outboard mic pre is a great bonus. Apart from the 48V phantom power button, all pushbuttons on the front panel supply a reassuring relay click.

On the left of the front panel is an uncalibrated

fader pot, along with a stiffly clicking stepped gain control marked for microphone input gain sensitivity from -15 to -60dB, alongside a scale from +10 to -35dB for the Line input, which is a second rear panel Neutrik XLR/jack combi. The first small pushbutton switches to Line input — on the original unit this wasn't present and there were 5 line and 6 mic gain positions on the gain knob. Now, each input has 10 positions, allowing finer resolution of the (coarse) gain. Remaining small buttons are a 20dB pad on the microphone input, 48V phantom (also not present on the original model), and polarity reverse.

The 4-band EQ is arranged left to right from High to Low; this Daking unit is optionally available with sideways legending for a more conventional console arrangement, so rotated 90 degrees clockwise this makes more sense. The older version featured four fixed switchable frequencies per band, based on a 1970s Trident design. This new one has five frequencies per band (apparently because the new generic components feature five positions!) but is still Trident-based. In fact the whole unit is very similar to a Trident A-range input module, with the same ratio on the input transformer. The main difference is that the Trident had no output transformer, whereas the Daking does.

EQ bands comprise high and low shelf and two peaking mid bands. Band frequencies overlap giving a selection of very well-chosen frequencies from 30Hz to 20kHz. Although these are switched, I never felt I was missing out on any possibilities; everything

you need is here. Nor did it even occur to me that I needed Q controls — the fixed bandwidth also seems perfect in almost any situation. The continuous gain/cut knobs lack a centre detente, but each frequency selector features an Off position, and there is an illuminating overall Bypass button. The gain knobs are uncalibrated, with just a series of dots around them. Suffice to say, there is bags of clean boost and cut available, yet fine adjustments are certainly possible, with things becoming much more dramatic as you turn the knob past about 45 degrees.

Filters are provided at the top end at 15kHz, and at the bottom at 25Hz — the former possibly useful for cleaning up and warming bass sounds, the latter useful for removing very low thumps and bumps without affecting the signal.

The character of the mic preamp is truly astonishing. Hearing a singer close to a large condenser through good monitoring reveals far more detail than heard with just about anything I compared it to. There seems to be less wooliness than many classic valve and/or solid state units, but there is no lack of warmth. And the clarity of the top end is astounding, with a beautiful enhancement in the detail of any source, without the perceived exaggeration of the very high frequencies I hear in modern Amek and Focusrite designs.

This unit seems to owe a lot to ancient designs, but perhaps makes a more sensible purchase than a vintage unit with its correspondingly worn-out components. This Daking has all the magic of classic designs but none of the unreliability. And it undoubtedly has more sparkle, richness and detail. ■

## Contact

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### PROS

Supremely high quality mic preamp; powerful and clean EQ.

### CONS

Very poor front panel legending; no DI input.

### EXTRAS

Daking also makes consoles and describes its 1112 Custom Sidecar/Console as 'today's "A" Range'. The desk has 8 multitrack buses plus a stereo bus with four sends, the same mic-pre/EQ circuit as the 52270B, relay switching, Jensen transformers, Class A discrete circuitry, auto-mute group muting, and direct channel outputs.

