

Drawmer TS1

Combining the manufacturer's experience in dynamics and tubes with a pinch of digital, this new range also offers an affordable entry level for the company's admirers. **ZENON SCHOEPE** is down in the tube station at midnight.



THE TS1 AND ITS SIBLING the TS2 have attracted a lot of expectation as they promise a way in to the sort of technology that normally appears very much higher up the Drawmer range. The TS1 is a single channel recording preamp with a stereo compressor-limiter and tube circuit patched on the end. The box supplied came with the DC1 digital output board that is an option on both TubeStation units.

This interface provides AES-EBU on XLR and coaxial SPDIF plus an external clock BNC with associated 'locked' LED that will be hard to spot when the box is screwed in to a rack. Two pushbuttons select sampling rates of 44.1, 48, 88.2 and 96kHz. While we're on the back panel we'll look at the other connectors. The stereo part of the box gets XLR I-Os plus a TRS sidechain breakout, while the preamp section gets an XLR input with TRS insert and the now increasingly rare inclusion of a preamp output on balanced jack. This provides a short recording signal path for mic or front panel instrument input, but the observant would have noted that this arrangement also means that you can do two things at once. It's perfectly possible to use the preamp to get a mic up to recording level while also compressing a stereo programme, for example.

This is not a complicated box to use or understand and the front panel is testament to this. However, the manual seems strangely curt by Drawmer's usual standards. The compressor section has an input gain control, which drives against a fixed threshold, plus Attack (0.5-50ms) and Release (0.05-5s) pots. Activity is reflected in an eight-LED gain reduction bargraph. Beyond this we reach the Tube Drive block with its one pot and separate Bypass switch. The latter is required as the only real way of bypassing the tube – turning the pot down merely reduces the effect, it doesn't remove it.

Input and output levels are monitored on two LED bargraphs and are switched with the global Bypass button. There's an analogue output level fader, a gain make up pot offering -30dB to +5dB, and a Limit LED that flashes when +16dB is hit and the built-in limiter is fired.

The preamp half of the fascia includes a gain pot (0dB to 60dB on mic and -20dB to +40dB on the front instrument socket), phantom power and phase reverse. Equalisation is restricted to a sweepable high pass filter (25Hz-250Hz) and what Drawmer calls HF

Contour – it seems to amount to a broadish HF lift. This might seem a little basic but it's fairly effective in use. The high pass works better than a fixed roll-off on mics and helps to remove some of the cloudiness that direct input guitars can exhibit, while the HF contour provides stacks of presence for bland mics and adds a splash of colour to humbucker guitars.

A button draws input to the dynamics and tube parts of the processing from the output of the preamp rather than from the line inputs. I not sure why I was so surprised that the dynamics work as well as they do on guitar and bass, but they do. The tube aspect is predictable in its action of putting a smiley face on a guitar signal while adding body, but this is no fuzz box or tube screamer.

The tube circuit can, of course, also be applied to programme or mic signals and adds sumptuous bottom body and presence lift simultaneously. The ballistic of the pot is curious as it is subtle but progressive for the first third of its travel, in a manner that is most apparent on good mic inputs, passes through a relatively static middle portion, and then becomes markedly graduated again for the last third of its travel when the wick is really being turned up. That's not a problem, it's an observation.

This is a box that works well on a number of different levels and allows its constituent parts to be

combined in different ways. The mic pre (a Class A design) deserves particular mention as results are immediately satisfying and variable by the simple but effective tonal shaping. It'll do justice to mics worth much more than the TS1's asking price. Dynamics are a Drawmer strong point and the circuit in the TS1 does not disappoint especially when combined with the tube drive. Again it sounds very expensive and classy.

One of the biggest drawbacks with the majority of recording channel style units is that they're mono. That's an irritation as frequently the processing can be excellent but completely useless in the context of a stereo mix – unless you choose to buy two.

The beauty of the TS1 is that it combines mono and stereo sections, which immediately allows it to straddle the tracking and mixing processes. It's also an unusual implementation and I'd argue that as a result it is a genuinely useful interpretation of the theme. Perfect for the project recordist or post and broadcast applications looking for a decent front end. One to investigate. ■

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PROS It's stereo with a mono preamp section; nice mic pre; tube drive and compressor are quality items.

CONS Word 'locked' LED on the rear panel; might be a bit too subtle for some; the manual.

EXTRAS Companion product to the TS1, the TS2 is a dual mono/stereo tube compressor-limiter with the option of the same 24/96 A-D conversion board as the TS1. Devoid of the preamp sections, the device effectively combines two sets of the TS1's compressor-limiter and tube drive sections on the one unit with a centrally positioned stereo link switch.

