

Joemeek OneQ

The most famous range of green outboard has undergone a facelift and retweak that has resulted in new permutations of old favourites. **ZENON SCHOEPE** explores a mono recording channel with lots of everything and, of course, that compressor.



THE NEW RANGE of Joemeek products is a completely different proposition to the last generation of products. The beauty and the appeal of the original Joemeeks was without doubt the sound and the fact that at the time of their introduction they were coming from a decidedly different direction than most other outboard products of their type. I think it would be safe to say that Joemeeks were standard bearers for a completely different take on the outboard theme. While most other boxes at the time were largely anonymous and slick in their delivery, Joemeeks presented character as an essential element, a retro feel combined with a quirkiness that was as curious as it was charming. The problem was that other brands seized on these popular attributes and ended up doing it all a bit better than Joemeek did whose gear started to look a little saggy while the range was widened and taken uncomfortably down market.

This reincarnation of the Joemeek brand, which includes the OneQ (UK£323 + VAT) being looked at here, aims to redress that balance and I have to say that it has managed to retain the bits that those who loved them loved about them. There's still an element of quirkiness and character and they still deliver high value in terms of the versatility and power. Best of all, this box demonstrates that the brand has shunned some of the quality issues that had begun to dog the old Joemeek units and puts the brand right back up there with the contenders, where it always should have been.

Designer Allan Bradford has done a fantastic job of breathing a little magic on the circuits (he was the man behind the design of the superb CLM Dynamics Expounder and DB 8000s outboard) and the whole package smacks of quality — the new Joemeek green is more Aston Martin BRG metallic than that old sudden shade favoured by BMC. And there is a lot on this unit, which despite appearances is actually only a single recording channel. The TwinQ offers stereo compression and Meequalization in a 2U but drops the enhancer and de-esser of the OneQ so it's not immediately comparable.

So let's whizz through the front panel and I'll try to refrain from continually crossreferencing to the original units to highlight differences because those that know the old units will be able to work those out for themselves. You're getting a preamp section, optical compressor, Meequalizer, enhancer and de-

esser together with a large meter that is switchable to monitor output, input or gain reduction. The rear panel includes a digital output section with optical, SPDIF phono and AES-EBU XLR ports to 96kHz plus Word clock I-O. This section effectively outputs the culmination of the OneQ signal path but the other leg of the stereo can be inserted via a rear panel jack, which means you can add an additional channel into the conversion stream should you wish. A bit on the marginal side of handy but it ticks the quirky box.

Analogue rear panel connectors take in XLR mic and balanced output, balanced jack line input and -10/+4 jack output plus an insert socket that is immediately after the preamp. There's also a compressor Link socket with Master/Slave selector switch that does what you'd think it might when two OneQs are coupled for stereo. The front panel gets an XLR mic input and instrument jack input plus switches for phantom, pad, phase reverse, mic/line-DI switch selection, high pass filter and peak LED to run with the Gain pot. There's also an Iron switch to select transformer coupling for mic input.

The opto compressor comes next although it is possible to switch the EQ ahead of it. We get pots for Compress (threshold), Slope (ratio), Attack (1-100ms), Release (0.1-3s) and 20dB of Gain Makeup. You can rest assured that the compressor has retained the essential interactive and adaptive nature of the original boxes in the way that the response 'slides' and 'tilts' depending upon the pot settings and the intensity of the source. However, there's something altogether more polished about this circuit — you can hammer into it really hard with superbly satisfying results and then go to 11 and like it even more. It has the ability to do more subtle/transparent stuff at more delicate settings and it's more flexible and certainly more refined than the original. I was pleased that it still sounds like no other compressor — there would be no point to it if it didn't.

The Meequalizer is 4-band with two-frequency switchable LF and HF bands (80/120Hz and 7/14kHz respectively) and sweepable mids covering 200Hz-2kHz and 1-6kHz with +/-15dB across each band. Now, I liked the original Meequalizer although I know many who found it less than useful or spectacular. This new incarnation is substantially removed in having more bands and the ranges of the two mids are nicely restrained. So, on paper at least, it's more proper EQ

than 'tone' control and in use it's certainly more flexible than the original while still being kind and flattering.

Enhancers have not been a weapon of choice for me since the 1980s and it's curious to see one here but Joemeeks have sported a few over the years. This one offers a pot for determining the frequency above which enhancement is to occur, a Q pot to dial in a resonant peak at the aforementioned frequency, and a control to adjust the amount of the effect. It's convenient to have this sort of processing on a box like this as it can be useful to add a bit to a vocal but it might have been better in a stereo configuration, which this box isn't. It all depends on whether you will use it. More genuinely useful to me is the inclusion of a really rather good de-esser with pots that allows you to tune in on the offending frequency — while listening to the sidechain on a dedicated switch — and set the threshold for the gain reduction which is signalled by a LED.

We're then down to an output fader pot, some LEDs for Peak and external clock lock indication, and the individual bypass switches for the EQ, de-esser, enhancer and the compressor. Only the compressor gets a bright blue On LED, all the others are green and in my opinion not distinct enough from the yellow of some of the other function buttons to be clear.

I really like this unit because it sounds great and it is stacked full of features. The preamp is superb offering super-quiet delivery and a fast fat sound on mics with plenty of capacity for delicacy. The Iron button's a nice touch. The whole channel is of course available to line level signals and the DI is useful. All in, a great tracking tool that'll give quality results with a quality signature.

I'm not surprised that I've enjoyed the OneQ as much as I have but I am surprised by the build quality and presentation, which is very much higher than anything I've ever associated with the brand. There are no scratchy pots, wonky bits and no not-quite-finished feel. It's testament to the appeal of the old units that they were forgiven so much. The OneQ is smooth, the switches are a delight, the meter is great and the colour and simple sculpturing of the front panel is lovely. Best of all I can read the legending at arm's length, which is more than can be said of the old black on green.

If the intention was to take all that was good about the old Joemeeks and bring it up-to-date and to make improvements where improvements were possible then I have to concede that this has been achieved.

Traditionally around this point I should be going off on one about the fact that the unit is only mono and that if only it were stereo then I could mark it the full ten. Strangely I'm not inclined to pursue this line as the channel is so comprehensive and powerful that I don't think I'd enjoy the prospect of a stereo box with this amount of functionality on it. The OneQ is quite clearly up there with the very best front-ends that you are likely to encounter. I'm not saying that there aren't boxes that are classier in certain respects but nothing quite delivers the features, performance and unique character combination of the OneQ. ■

PROS

Sound; character; that compressor; the package; build quality.

CONS

Stereo digital output on a mono unit novel; On LEDs could all have been blue.

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