



Neve Genesys

Neve's 88R flagship analogue console has been around since 2001, and while a wide range of outboard has benefited from this console's technology, it has taken until relatively recently for Neve to distil this into a more affordable mid-range console.

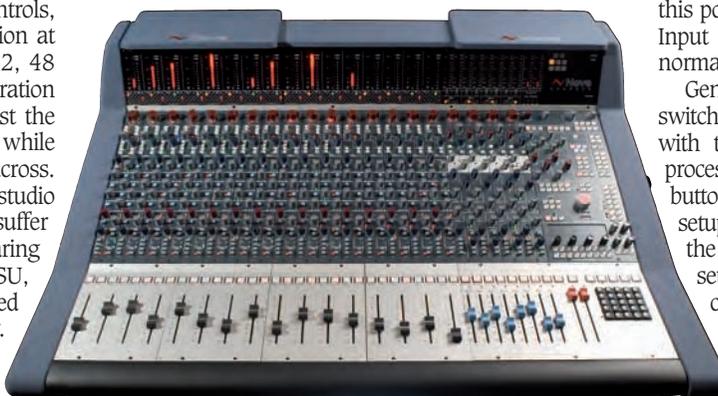
GEORGE SHILLING examines the Genesys.

The 88R's designer Robin Porter was at the helm for the design of the Genesys, which is UK-built alongside its big brother. Porter has managed to cram plenty of functionality into this diminutive model, with many bases covered. Although less than two years since the launch, there has already been a slight update to some hardware aspects, and the software has inevitably been updated several times (leading to some slight confusion when an early manual didn't quite correspond to the console in front of me!)

Modular channels feature mostly analogue controls, but there is also a dedicated DAW control section at the centre. Available frame sizes are 16, 24, 32, 48 or even 64 channels wide. The smallest configuration would almost fit in a metre cube box (with just the end cheeks taking it slightly over a metre wide) while the 64-channel frame takes it to roughly 3m across. The small size is clearly attractive to project studio owners and room acoustics will undoubtedly suffer minimal disturbance. With all connections appearing on the rear of the unit, and with an internal PSU, the Genesys is easily set up and configured whether or not you decide to wire up a patchbay. Yet despite the small dimensions, there are plenty of 'big console' feature specs. Each

channel is a separate module, and the centre section includes a number of modular boards for relatively easy servicing. A high level of customer configuration is possible at the ordering stage, with the philosophy being that savings can be made by omitting sections that won't be needed.

The brain of the Genesys comprises an onboard PC 'cassette', this operates a number of features, and an external screen is required for basic operations such as rebooting, as well as more advanced and optional features and functions.



Encore Plus automation is an option, which controls channel and monitor mute and fader. However, the monitor fader is a rotary pot, so moves must be written with the faders flipped, then you switch to 'Aut' mode on a per-channel basis to enable playback of moves and disable the pot.

Most switches are soft while most knobs are traditional analogue pots but, with the optional Recall module, fairly quick resetting is possible in the traditional manner of matching knob positions to the on-screen display, while all switches reset themselves upon recall. Many of the knobs incorporate a push-function button, saving space on the strip.

The basic console includes inline channel strips featuring 88R-type mic preamps, separate DAW monitor path, and a bunch of aux sends with eight routing buses going to a stereo main bus — routing is also software controlled. Surround is also catered for with two external 5.1 inputs as well as two stereos, and there is a Downmix monitoring status for collapsing 5.1 into stereo. A 5.1 mix mode uses six of the eight buses and you can set channels' Auxes for 5.1 routing.

A beautiful and impressive meterbridge sits at the back with wonderfully bright level meters, a comprehensive set of metering options, and LEDs for statuses such as routing and signal present/overload, with a wide range of thresholds for the last of these. Optional hardware cartridges slot into the rear of the console including 8-channel A-D/D-A cassettes, and 8-channel EQ and Dynamics cassettes, providing software controlled three-band 1084-type EQ, and 88R-style Dynamics. The centre section provides controls for these, with the outer ring of 'dual-concentric' on-screen knobs controlled by pushing down and turning the four encoder knobs in the centre section, with individual channels accessed using their easy to find yellow Select buttons, which are located on the lower part of the channel strip.

At the top of the channel strip is the continuously rotating encoder knob for mic gain, described by Neve as a 'Logicator' (Which is an AMS term. Ed). The inbuilt LEDs display the 11 discrete steps from +20 to +70dB for mic gain. Pushing this knob (which is cleverly designed to look like a big old 1960s/1970s Neve knob) apparently toggles through three modes. However, the mode labelled DAW is presently redundant, pending future implementation in software. The FNC (function) mode displays monitor fader automation level during playback using the LEDs. The microphone preamp is similar in design to that found on the 88R, and this gain knob is accompanied by the usual settings for phantom, phase and pad (20dB), plus a Hi-Z setting with an alternative mic impedance. Here there is also a useful fixed high-pass filter set at 90Hz. Sadly the optional '1084' EQ omits the original 1084's filters. There is a separate input for Line on the rear of the console, and all paths then go through a +/-15dB trim pot. Pressing this pot chooses between Mic, Line, DAW and Digital Input (if the digital board is fitted), with DAW input normally going to the monitor path.

Generously, there are two fully balanced soft-switchable insert points on each channel and, along with the EQ and Dynamics, the order of all four processes can be set using the software by tapping the buttons in the desired order after unlocking a hidden setup mode. You can interrogate the channel and the lights blink to show the order that has been set. Furthermore, all can be freely assigned to the channel or monitor path (in any order).

Each channel features six or eight auxes depending on how you look at it — four individual mono sends and a section that can

select and control one of two stereo auxes. However, each of the five aux sections can also be sent to buses 7 and 8 via an adjacent button labelled 8T, for a number of possible uses.

A remarkably flexible Direct Output section on each channel features a level fader (-infinity to +10dB) that toggles through six different possible options, including monitor or channel sourcing, pre or post processing and pre or post fader.

The monitor fader pot is accompanied by a DAW Send/Return toggle, a pan pot, and a button labelled I/P 2. This merges a second input with the DAW. The Ch button sources the Channel input, toggling through Pre or Post fader (the LED changing colour to indicate the mode). Iso isolates Channel, Monitor or both from the Solo system, again indicated only by different LED colours. The Sel button is used for a number of functions. It calls EQ and Dynamics to the main screen, and also comes into play for setting 8T and mix routing, and setting automation modes. The 8T button is another multistate toggling function button, with modes for routing channel or monitor to the 8Ts, and a hybrid state for surround and group modes. Swp swaps the large and small fader and cut, and when automating swaps the data also. A 'To Mon' LED indicates when any of the Inserts, Dynamics or EQ are inserted on the monitor path.

Four Reverb Returns each use a Logicator for level, a send to either or both Cues, Pan/Bal and Width knobs, an Iso button, a Mono button and an AFL solo.

DAW control is via the HUI protocol and uses the eight faders at the centre section. These faders can also operate as 8T group masters. Four soft knobs operate HUI panning or auxes, four channels at a time. These are the same ones used for adjusting Genesys's optional internal EQ and Dynamics sections. There is also a smart set of illuminating transport controls above the numeric keypad.

There's an on-screen routing matrix for quickly assigning multiple paths or destinations but alternatively you can use the channel Set button in combination with a bank of routing buttons in the centre section.

Neve is keen to prove it is 'down with da kidz' and has implemented a mobile phone texting method of entering label names via the numeric keypad, the idea of which is to avoid having a Qwerty keyboard cluttering up the working area. In practice, I suspect that even keen texters will find it a bit fiddly, and will end up doing it the old fashioned way.

All possible useful Solo functions are covered with a choice of Interlock, Momentary or Latching modes and there's a handy reset button in the centre section. Disturbingly, in Settings screen mode on the computer I found that the talkback button didn't operate. Indeed, according to the manual, in Master Sel mode (used for setting aux pre/post states, channel processing order, etc.) 'the majority of the console's audio functionality is blocked out,' but this is probably to avoid clicks and splats.

The Genesys I looked at featured Alps faders, with a fairly light feel. They are well spaced and pleasant to use. The HUI/Group faders are more closely spaced, but feel similarly smooth. As is traditional with Neve consoles there is a pan pot On button, with a 3dB centre; the main fader pan pot is rather inconveniently (for mixing) located near the top of the channel. Main mix inserts can use a mix setting for parallel compression and suchlike, using the Insert Mix Return level which crossfades between insert return and main mix. Clever.

Headphone cue mixes are comprehensively catered for with two separate circuits. There is a handy headphone output on the front of the centre section with a beefy enough amp for most headphones and its own source select, so it can follow control room or

select an External or either Cue.

Usefully, there is a comprehensive Oscillator section with full routing possibilities, and there is even a pink noise generator that can be routed to the loudspeakers. The main monitor volume is a lovely lightly-stepped pot with a level readout, and hidden monitoring-related push-functions.

Unlike traditional consoles, the Genesys is not a desk that you could operate blind without a lot of help from a knowledgeable assistant — there are simply too many 'hidden' functions. A number of settings are indicated by different coloured LEDs with no visible clue as to what they mean. However, I'm sure that it wouldn't take long to learn the necessary tricks and clues in a personal studio environment. So although there is certainly something of a learning curve involved, most owners would soon familiarise themselves with operation. Genesys is clearly targeted

at project studios or owner-operators and as such I am sure it will find many eager customers wanting a chunk of Neve greatness. ■

PROS Extraordinary routing and configuration flexibility; many customer options; comprehensive centre section; full recall possible; excellent meterbridge; automation of both channels and monitor paths (optional); HUI control.

CONS Many functions not obvious so there is a learning curve; no EQ filters (except on the mic pre).

Contact

AMS-NEVE, UK:

Website: www.ams-neve.com

UK, KMR Audio: +44 208 445 2446