URS Strip Pro

When replacing hardware with software it's nice to be offered the option to install software emulations of hardware you could never have owned. URS offers a desk-full of exotic stuff; NEIL WILKES creates his own strip.

U RS has developed into a strong but low-key plug-in brand after arriving with its Classic Console EQ plug-ins featuring emulations of various Neve, API and SSL parametric and graphic EQs, as well as its Classic Console Compressors package, again with Neve and SSL models recreated. This latest offering is the jewel in the crown though, as it is a channel strip *par excellence* combining everything you are ever likely to require from such a plug-in in the one interface. There's also a cut-back version as a bonus for those less-than-critical situations, but it is the Pro version that is truly outstanding.

What makes it special is the sound of it. URS is not saying how it is all done but it is not convolution in the way I understand it and neither does it sound like a simple case of overlaying an EQ curve created from the original equipment. The result is at the same time too subtle at one end of the scale and too fat and analogue sounding at the other end for it to be that simple.

Installation is extremely straightforward in PC Native VST format. You will need an iLOK though, and even the demo licenses require this as well. Simply download your license; run the installer, reboot and you are ready.

On my DAW, running Nuendo 4.1 on a Quad-Core

and British, US and German transformer stages with and without tape stages and Tube input. The control slider allows for 0 to 200% of saturation, with 100% representing the original. This gives the user a range of options from extremely subtle to heavy saturation and in many ways it is the real soul of this plug-in for me.

The compressor is the first thing you will need to set up as whenever you select one of the 60+ starting points from the drop-down button, it will automatically select the optimal input stage for that particular compressor type. For me, this is the flaw in the plug-in and I would be much happier to be able to set the input stage first, and then the compressor afterwards. The current version doesn't allow this but the good news is that an 'unlock' option will available in a forthcoming update.

Again, as with the input stage, the compressor types include AES introduction years for the console compressors and various other outboard types that will be instantly recognisable to most users. For example, if you read 'Opto2a', it can really only mean one model and the same applies to 'Stress 3' and 'Fet 4/8/12/20/ALL' so you can easily decide on the type of compressor you want.

This stage can naturally be set to pre or post EQ by means of a toggle switch and there are

Intel Q6700 CPU, a single instance of this takes up a mere couple of percentage points — I can run 30 tracks of these with 24-bit audio at 40% CPU usage. To put this into some sort of perspective, let's have a look at what you get for your money (TDM/ RTAS/AU/VST US$1499; native RTAS/AU/VST US$749).

It's a four-stage plug-in. There's an input stage with 30 different options available ranging from 'Digital', which is effectively a bypass mode, going through various console inputs (the years correspond to the year each of the real-life counterparts were introduced at the AES, so the well versed can figure most of them out for themselves), tape types (1/2-inch and 2-inch at various speeds),

the traditional controls for Ratio, Attack, Release, Threshold and Gain Makeup. A very nice feature is the knee adjustment via a dial rather than the more common (and less flexible) toggle switch. Gain Reduction is displayed on its own meter (0 to 20dB) and the input/output metering is done by the plasma bars at the top of the plug-in. A red light will appear if the plug-in is clipped, although this is not theoretically possible in a floating point host. As with real analogue equipment, this plug-in also has its own 'sweet spot' that varies slightly from emulation to emulation but it is best to keep the output out of the danger area for a generally sweeter sound. If you do go over, then the red light can be cancelled with a mouse click.

The EQ is superb because of its combination of flexibility, tonal quality and ease of use. There are five types on offer — 1951, 1967, 1970, 1972 and 1980 and there are no prizes for working out the original equipment (Pultec, API, Neve, Neve and SSL) and you can either lock all four bands to one type with a switch, or else use a different type on each band. If a Pultec Low End with a Neve sheen on the top shelf floats your particular boat then this is easily achieved. The top and bottom bands are switchable between shelving and bell type filters. Assigned optional slopes on the shelving types should be considered for a future revision, in my opinion.

Finally we have the Hi and Lo pass filters and these can be pre or post compressor or set for sidechain (currently only in the TDM version). There are also signal flow icons to the left side of the interface with each section having an on/off button. Bringing up the rear are separate input and output level dials.

I used this strip exclusively on an entire mix, and was blown away by the sheer flexibility of it — from bass drums to vocals. You have to be prepared to spend some time getting to learn the often subtle differences between the models though. There are some very useful starting presets for this in addition to the individual model presets, and there is also a user-based website for posting and acquiring presets at www.ursstrippro.com/

The Strip Pro has moved straight to the top of my 'go to' list and I suspect it will do so for you too once you have tried it. ∎

PROS All the classic sounds at your fingertips in one plug-in; very flexible — subtle to sledgehammer; CPU efficient; separate Lite version also included.

CONS None that I can think of.

EXTRAS The URS M series MotorCity Equaliser claims to recreate the 7-band passive equalisers used exclusively by Motown

staff engineers during the Motown era. The sliders on the early units were apparently unreliable so Motown's chief technical engineer Mike McLean built 'Brick House' custom modified clones using stepped rotary switches on each band for added reliability and a variable gain booster amplifier for gain level matching.