

UA UAD Ampex and Lexicon

The number of plugs for the UAD platform continues to rise. **GEORGE SHILLING** has tracked on the A800 through an SSL and now needs something to mix to...oh, and a stereo reverb might be handy too.

The ongoing release schedule of UAD updates and new plug-ins continues apace and since the Studer A800 was introduced there have been a number of new additions. Two of the more interesting ones are vintage emulations that also originate in the late 1970s — the Ampex ATR-102 2-track tape machine and the Lexicon 224 digital reverb (US\$349 each) — and both are officially sanctioned by the original manufacturers. The 6.0 update also ditched the wrapper for RTAS, and revamped the way UAD handles Pro Tools automation. This improvement came at the expense of killing parameter automation in previous sessions, so for recalls I would suggest retaining a cloned system drive with V5.9.



AMPEX ATR-102 — The Ampex ATR-102 stereo tape recorder (introduced in 1976) has been regarded by many as the finest sounding mastering machine and surviving examples are highly prized. Plenty of great records have been

multitracked on a Studer and mixed to an Ampex, so this makes a great addition to the Studer plug-in for those wishing to emulate that chain.

The plug-in window comprises a fabulous graphic of the deck plate and meter bridge. Like the Studer plug-in there is an Open button that reveals the more advanced settings. Those who have tried the Studer will find that even more functionality and detail (and DSP usage) has gone into this plug. The plug-in uses internal up-sampling for greater sonic accuracy and this results in a slight increase in latency — not a problem when it is on the mix bus as intended.

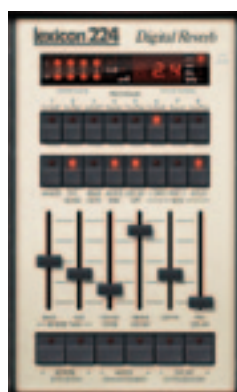
The window is dominated by animated spools revolving at appropriate speeds when the DAW is playing or recording. The Ampex features four speeds (3¾-30ips), three head widths (¼, ½ and the latter-day 1-inch mod), and there are seven tape types available with a choice of four at any time depending on head width and tape speed. Authentic NAB, CCR1

and AES emphasis EQ settings are available at the appropriate speeds.

As well as Hiss and Hum settings there are Crosstalk, Wow and Flutter adjustments available, plus the ability to individually defeat these degradations. AutoCal settings model realistic amounts of these, as well as setting 'optimum' alignment for speed and tape, although I have a gripe with this, as it always sets the level about 1dB louder than bypass. Other details include audio transformer bypass for a cleaner signal path, which was apparently a mod done to some real-world examples. Even the meter ballistics are accurately modelled, adding to the authenticity.

A full oscillator section with a virtual MRL test tape is provided for manual lining up — strictly for obsessive geeks — the meters are just about big enough to set accurately; all line-up trims are provided including bias and EQ, and there's even a Distortion percentage readout. Another bonus is a simple Tape Delay effects section — there is a Dry/Wet setting but no feedback control; the delay follows the tape speed but can be set manually in milliseconds up to 1,000.

There are plenty of 'celebrity' engineer presets and some extreme special effects. Mastering engineer Stephen Smith's settings are optimised for the flattest possible response with more extension than the AutoCal settings. The differences between different head widths and tape types can naturally be subtle, but there's still no mistaking the enhancement, glue and glow that even these 'flat' settings can give to music programme; a magical presence is often (but not always) apparent. However, as with AutoCal, these seemed to add 2-3dB gain compared to bypass, so for fair comparison they need to be trimmed. On 44.1kHz sessions I didn't always get the magic tingle I remember feeling from the AnaMod ATS-1. And the myriad options here seem more daunting. But this can certainly enhance a mix, and is an impressive feat of engineering and design.



LEXICON 224 — The 224's rich digital reverb was all over the hits of the 80s and beyond and this plug-in looks like the original 224 remote that sat atop many a console. On closer inspection, some of the buttons have been 're-purposed' to eliminate the unnecessary preset management functions and expose previously 'buried' controls, making this easier to operate. Furthermore, an 'Open' legending reveals hidden controls but the authentic functionality of the original hardware is maintained, with sliders controlling the parameters, their resultant value displayed in red LEDs for 1.5 seconds before defaulting back to average decay time. A 'hidden' function defeats this and holds the display to the last adjusted setting. Reverb is split into two audio bands. The Crossover slider sets the frequency where the Bass and Mid Decay times are split. The Treble Decay slider sets the roll-off frequency above which decay is very short.

The original seven algorithms and nine wonderfully rich programmes (eight reverb plus chorus) of the 224 are accurately emulated. Each loads with the default Lexicon setting, but for auditioning algorithms using the same basic settings, you can engage Immediate mode. There is a useful library of presets created by the likes of Chuck Zwicky, Kevin Killen and Eric Thormgren.

The 224 was a 'true stereo' reverb with four outputs — stereo reverb imaging of panned inputs makes interesting listening. The additional pair of



outputs provided on the hardware for quadrasonic effects can even be selected on the plug-in for authentic surround use (using two instantiations; there is no quad version of the plug-in). The Overflow LED is not simply a matter of level overload, it indicates mathematical overload of the processing, so it can also result from overdoing the Decay controls, and this has been faithfully modelled. System Noise and adjustment artefacts of the original unit have also been implemented but can be defeated.

Mode Enhancement was Lexicon's trick of modulating delays in the reverb tail to thicken the sound and prevent ringy reverb tails. The default settings rarely needed adjusting, so this was a hidden function, but now it is easily available to play with for experimentation. Additional fun can be had with it by using the setting in conjunction with nudging the hidden Pitch Shift buttons to enrich the chorusing effects. Decay Optimization was another clever Lexicon trick that reduced diffusion and colouration in response to input level; when there is a gap, the reverb gets richer, but during the music more clarity is retained. Its adjustment was originally hidden, but can now be easily tweaked.

You may be pleasantly surprised by the remarkable warmth and richness of such antique digital technology. If you're looking for short, thick drum enhancement, Percussion Plate is a fantastic starting point. I loved the warm, atmospheric Small Hall B on female jazz vocals; the expansive Hall, rich-sounding Plate, and characterful Chamber and Room algorithms provide great starting points to find something suitable for all instruments. Being able to automate, say, the Depth/Diffusion for different sections of a song is fantastic. The lush sound of the 224 is as impressive as ever. Can I have an AMS RMX-16 next please? ■

Ampex ATR-102

PROS Wholesome tape warming effects; astonishing attention to detail; bonuses of oscillator and tape delay.

CONS AutoCal settings are cheekily louder than bypass; bypass sometimes better!

Lexicon 224

PROS Vibrant, warm reverberation; super-accurate modelled sonics and behaviours; all the convenience of a plug-in.

CONS None

Contact

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