

Waves Q-Clone

We've all heard of Dolly the sheep, but Dolly the Neve module? Brad Watts tucks some prized outboard under his arm and dives into the replicator!

Waves audio plug-ins have been around a long time. In fact, I'd wager Waves was the first company to begin the idea way back in around 1994. When the first suite of Waves plugs was released for Sound Designer, the two-track editor from Digidesign, there was no such thing as a real-time plug-in. Not for me anyway, as I'd not yet splashed out on a TDM rig. I recall we were still waiting for PCI-equipped Macs to arrive. In those days the processes were carried out off-line with Audio Suite versions of the plug-ins. It was slow and not the most immediate way to work. Imagine now having to make changes to a plug-in's settings then nipping out for a coffee while it rendered on a 66 or 80MHz computer.

It was worth the wait, though, as nothing offered the capabilities of this new suite of Waves plugs. Nothing sounded as good. These quickly became known as the Swiss Army knife of processors and are still stalwarts of audio editing today. Find an engineer who hasn't used the mighty L1 Ultramaximiser and you'll find a guy who probably hasn't worked for the last 10 years. Since then the Waves range has expanded to include the Renaissance line of vintage processors along with just about every other style of processor known – harmonisers, delays, phase-linear EQs, spectrum analysers and multiband compressors are all represented in the Waves lineup.

The Q-Clone represents yet another direction for Waves. This time, instead of offering to replace your outboard EQ equipment, Q-Clone augments and multiplies it. How's it do that then? Let's have a look.

Send in the Clones

Q-clone is an EQ 'cloning' or 'modelling' device. It captures the equalisation curve of a single mono analogue EQ and applies that curve to any track you wish – that includes stereo channels. The plug-in will clone the linear aspect of any analogue signal path; i.e., it will not replicate modulating sources such as distortion, compression or noise. Q-Clone is for replicating the properties of filters and their phase responses. The system comes equipped with a large library of sampled EQ curves from classic and vintage hardware. These presets can be used without having your own hardware EQ to sample but, really, this is all about utilising your personal hardware.

The package comprises two separate plug-ins. The first, aptly dubbed Q-Capture, is set up within your host software to send and receive a signal via an unused audio input and output. You will need a multi I/O audio card to do this. Waves provides in-depth info on setting this up for all the major platforms. The Q-Capture component sends a continuous test signal to the input of your tasty piece of top-shelf EQ hardware (if you route the signal to your monitoring outputs you'll hear the quickly repeated sweep sine wave). The output of that hardware device is then routed back to an input of the Q-Capture plug-in – which closely monitors the equalised signal for any changes.

The second plug-in, Q-Clone, is then inserted on a track you wish to EQ. You set the plug-in to 'Capture' mode and suddenly you're adjusting the plug's EQ display with your outboard device. It's odd at first but after a quick listen you realise just how useful Q-Clone



System Requirements

- Q-Clone on Windows OS
Digidesign – Supports RTAS and HTDM only on ProTools 6.7cs5.
VST – Cubase SX 3.0.1 / Nuendo 3
DirectX – On Sonar 3.1.1 Cubase SX 3.0.1 and Nuendo 3
- Q-Clone on OS X
Digidesign – Supports RTAS and HTDM only on ProTools 6.7cs5.
VST – Only Cubase SX 3 / Nuendo 3.
Audio Units – Full support in Logic 7 only.
MAS – Full support.

could be. Once you arrive at a suitable setting you simply put the plug-in into Hold mode and it keeps the setting. Pretty sneaky. Settings can be saved as user presets so there's the scope for a huge library of 'EQ signatures' to be created and swapped. An additional 'Add' button allows a second EQ curve to be added to the present settings, ostensibly doubling the bands available from any hardware device.

I set up the plug-in using Logic Pro, ProTools and Digital Performer without the slightest hiccup. What did amaze me was utilising Q-Clone in a DTDM environment within Logic. The Capture plug-in was an HTDM plug instanced on a TDM insert, while the Q-Clone plug was instanced on DTDM tracks. Absolutely seamless integration. In use, equalising tracks becomes very quick. I'd happily give up all other plug-in EQs simply for the immediacy of working this way.

Clone-ing Around

The big question is how does it sound in comparison to the real thing? When I first set up the Q-Clone I quickly set about grabbing 'signatures' from all my (and some borrowed) outboard that was laying about in the studio at the time: the Akai S1000 for crunchiness, a couple of valve mic preamps, some old and very dodgy Tascam EQs and a vintage Neve 1093 channel module. These were simple 'straight through' samples along with all the high- and low-pass settings of the Neve taken to add to tracks in the future – 'character masks' if you will. The Q-Clone definitely captures enough to give a very convincing rendition of the original hardware. Obviously not perfect but very close. No doubt the capture would be better served using the best converters you have, or better still, via a digital connection.

For me the Q-Clone is an exciting piece of gear. Being able to use the Neve 1093 across a dozen or so tracks of a mix improved it immensely – simply because I could take advantage of the Neve's EQ slopes. In short? A winner of a plug-in. You just need some gear worth emulating.



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