Universal Audio PC MAC
Trident A-Range EQ $249

Yet another meticulously modelled UAD EQ, but in these hard-up times, is there enough here to tempt you?

ON THE DVD

Hear the EQ shaping sounds in our audio clips and read the manual

> **Recent plug-in releases from Universal Audio**, such as the Fatso Jr/Sr speciality compressor and the EMT250 reverb, have been UAD-2-only, so it's good to see that their latest release is compatible with the older cards, too. More tantalising is the fact that it's touted as an accurate recreation of the renowned EQ section from the Trident A-Range Desk.

That console was designed in the early 1970s and Trident tuned the EQ design 'by ear', so although they attempted to achieved minimal distortion, the inductor design actually contributed to a coloured sound with plenty of phase shift. It sounded good, though, and indeed, this is what made it so popular and why it now makes for a desirable plug-in choice.

The basic design offers four configurable bands, along with high- and low-pass filters. The low-mid and high-mid bands are bell-shaped and book-ended by low and high shelving filters. The Trident A predates sweepable EQ designs, and each band features four switchable frequencies. However, gain is continuously variable (±15dB) and, like the original, uses faders instead of the usual knobs. Note that there are no Q settings, so the shelf and bell shapes can't be tweaked.

The high- and low-pass filters each have three frequency settings, and rather unusually, these can be combined, resulting in more extreme settings. The high-pass filters are 18dB/octave, with the low-pass operating at 12dB/octave. Rounding things off are a phase reverse switch, output level control and global EQ bypass switch. Finally, it's worth noting that the plug-in orientation has been rotated 90 degrees compared to how the EQ section appeared on the original desk.

The colour and the shape

So how does it sound? Firstly, it's a powerful sound-shaping tool and sonically very obvious. This makes it great for EQing drums, beats and anything for which colouration is desirable. Even so, its fixed-band nature can sometimes leave you struggling for specific frequencies, particularly in the low-mids.

With very little frequency overlap between bands, you might assume the A-Range is pretty clinical, but band interaction is considerable. For example, boosting the low and high shelves together eventually results in in the highest frequencies being subdued. The high-mid EQ also changes shape slightly as you boost the low-mids. What's more, each mid-band curve is affected by the frequency setting of the other, even if the other's gain is zero.

Finally, the three-way filters also add their own degree of flavour. So, combining all three high-pass filters results in a steeper tail-off than using just 100Hz. In terms of DSP usage, we managed three stereo instances on our UAD-1e card (a UAD-2 Solo is said to manage 11 stereo) – not a huge number, but in line with similar UAD 'analogue' EQs like the Neve 1081.

Overall, the Trident A-Range is an idiosyncratic EQ that can be both confusing and charming – just like the original. Once again, Universal Audio have made available a rare classic sourced from the original equipment, and that fact may make the price tag a little easier to swallow. **cm**

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System requirements

PC 256MB RAM, Windows XP/Vista, UAD-1/UAD-2 card, VST/RTAS host

Mac 256MB RAM, OS X 10.4, UAD-1/UAD-2 card, AU/VST/RTAS host

Alternatively

Softube Trident A-Range
N/A >> N/A >>$279
Forthcoming native emulation of the same EQ

Waves API Collection
cm118 >> 9/10 >> $1000
For analogue flavour, it's hard to beat Waves recreation of the classic API desk modules

Verdict

For Great coloured sound
Interesting band interplay
Clever high-/low-pass filter design
Modelled on a rare classic desk

Against Expensive
Layout mildly confusing
Less clinical than modern parametrics

Universal Audio have done it again with a fascinating reproduction of a quirky classic

8/10

Brand management

Unusual in the world of pro audio, Trident is famous as both a recording studio and an analogue hardware brand. However, it was the studio that got the ball rolling in the late 60s. This Soho facility played host to many famous sessions (including those for Bowie's _Space Oddity_ album) and producers such as Tony Visconti and Gus Dudgeon.

By the early 70s, changing equipment demands led them to develop their own mixing desk, and the Trident A-Series was born. This led to a gear-manufacturing business (Trident Audio Developments) and further consoles. However, only a handful of the A-Series were made (13 in total), and this scarcity combined with their unique sound ensured them legendary status.

Malcolm Toft, part of the driving force behind the A-Series, is still active in the ever-evolving world of pro audio equipment and the Trident Studios site now houses an audio post-production facility.