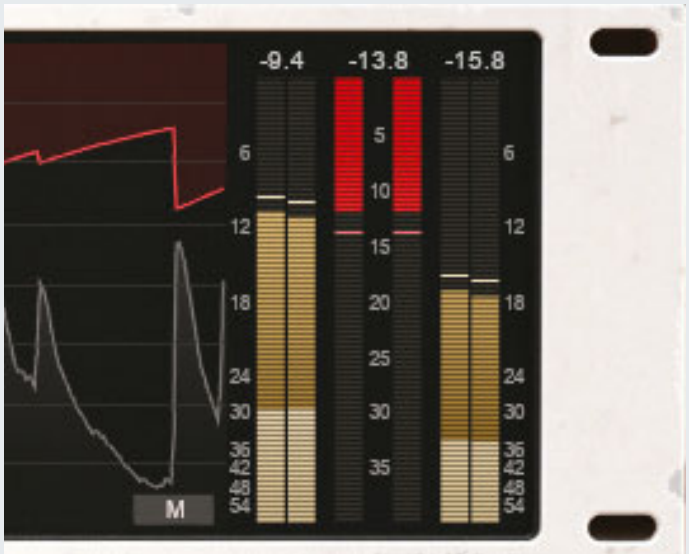
Pulsar 1178

The Urei 1176 is one of the most vaunted compressors in history thanks to its super-fast attack times, but also for its famous all-buttons-in trick. The stereo version of this classic FET hardware was the 1178, and married those super-useful features with the ability to work on two sides of a stereo signal at once. Pulsar's 1178 takes what producers loved about the 1178 (and 76) to digital territory. All the classic features are present, including a simulation of that all-buttons-in effect which smashes the signal. But Pulsar have also added mid/side capabilities, a selectable saturation stage, full gain reduction metering, and an entire EQ to work your magic on the compressor's detection circuit.

Starting to compress

The 1178 has no Threshold control unlike many compressors. Instead, you push up the Input gain to send the signal harder through the compression circuit, and then back off the Output gain control to compensate the level again, keeping an eye on right-hand meters. There's an onboard Power switch to bypass the compression action while keeping levels the same. The two matching control strips act for the left (top) and right (bottom) of the signal, and are linked by default.



Attack and release

The 1178 – just like the 1176 – is a FET compressor capable of extra-fast attack times, up to 20ms. Pulsar's 1176, like the original, gets to its fastest extent by turning the Attack knob up higher, not lower. The Release dial has this same inverse travel, but it doesn't go quite as fast. You can get a real handle on how quickly your Release is letting go of the signal using the top-right digital gain reduction meter. There are more Attack settings in the Sidechain panel, which we'll check out later.

Saturation styles

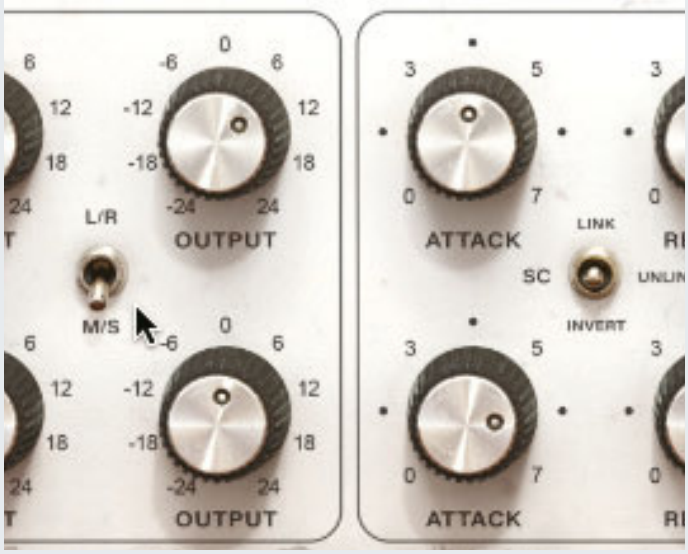
Pulsar's 1178 features an additional Saturation section, which lets you select from four modes to imbue the signal with analogue goodness. Tape mode simulates the imperfections of recording to tape; Triode mode takes on the sound of a Class A tube amplifier with an emphasis on odd harmonics; Warm is a subtler distortion that smooths out higher frequencies; and Clip gives you a rougher digital clipping effect. Each style of saturation uses the Calibration screw below to raise or lower its application.

A FET accompli

Urei's 1176 and 1178 used FET (Field Effect Transistor) components, which led to both having remarkable quick attack timings – as low as 20ms. If this wasn't a distinguishing enough feature for Urei's compressor family, there was another special property: when all four Ratio buttons were pressed in together, these compressors would exhibit extreme gain reduction behaviour, affecting the timings of the compression action as well as the depth and strength.

< All buttons in

Let's talk Ratio control. A very 1176 feature, you can select four standard compression ratios or go with the all-buttons-in selection. This emulates the trick of pushing in all the ratio buttons on an original 1176 or 1178 FET compressor, smashing the signal in a compression action, also affecting the attack/release timings. Thanks to the onboard Mix control, the All button gives extreme parallel compression, blending the original and processed signals.

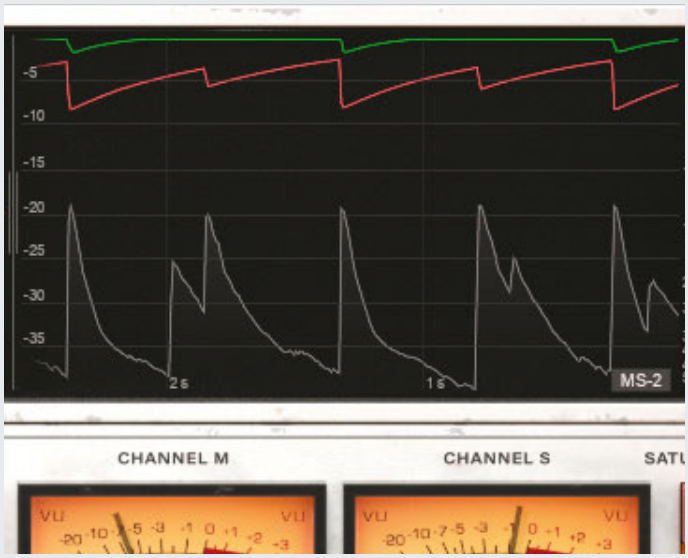


< Mid/side and stereo detection

These switches open the 1178's stereo options: Between the Input and Output knobs, you can switch the unit into Mid/Side mode instead of the regular Left/Right, taking control over the centre of the audio or everything stereo. By unlinking the channels, we control Input, Output, Attack and Release for the Mid and Side signals separately. Between the Attack and Release dials, the SC switch chooses if the detection circuit listens to the channel separately, together, or swaps them over.

Sidechain EQ >

Most are used to some filtering functionality on a compressor plugin. By removing some of the lower frequencies from a compressor's signal path, it reacts less to kick drums and bass information, reducing harsh pumping. Pulsar 1178 goes further, with an entire sidechain EQ to carve frequencies out of (and into) the signal once it hits the detection circuit. So you can emphasise the compression of a snare, de-harsh cymbals, and control where compression is emphasised.



< More metering

As well as old-school VU-style meters, with their needles bobbing up and down to the tune of the left- and right-side gain reduction, the 1178 also gives you modern digital metering. LED-style meters for in/output let you monitor both channels on the way in and out, and check gain reduction. And you'll notice that 21st-century gain reduction graph, helping to visualise the compressor's release behaviour and the difference between hits as they happen. FM