



Klark Teknik DN530 & DN540

The march of digital has not conquered all before it as analogue boxes have made the outboard rack their stronghold.

ZENON SCHOEPE looks at two new quad channel dynamics units with a live production slant but equal appeal to the studio.

Despite the fact that we can get all sorts of digital dynamic control options in the box, in the desk or in the platform of your choice there are still a stubborn list of real-world applications where a good old analogue box is going to ring the appropriate bell. Going digital in part on an analogue rig is potentially still as problematic as going analogue in part on a digital rig. Without getting too tied up with the underlying reasoning, politics, and propaganda the fact remains that the equipment rack remains a central item in any production system and these racks seem to be populated increasingly these days with just analogue gear. The digital stuff gets dealt with elsewhere.

High up in there among the prestige brands, the Klark Teknik moniker has always imparted feelings of dependable performance. It's maybe not the most exciting breed of the rackmount variety or one that users remain undecided on — KT is the brand you buy if you can afford it and if it's important to you to be able to forget about a box and just know that it will work.

Of course, the sort of boxes that KT produces will not light the touchpapers of hard-core analogue outboard recording aficionados of the valve and discrete inclination, the analogue units that KT produces are workhorses. Things have indeed moved on for analogue outboard and in the market that KT tends to occupy there's not nearly the sort of competition at all price points that there used to be. In the live production sector the groupies are increasingly chasing the digital but if you have a catalogue of analogue outboard that is still in demand and still being speeded you have to feed the chain. Many of you will know the DN514 Quad Gate and DN504 Quad Compressor and it's against this background that Klark Teknik has introduced the DNS530 Creative Quad Gate and the DNS540 Creative Quad compressor.

I have always been a big fan of multichannel dynamics boxes for a number of reasons. The first is that when I need a gate I never need just the one, I'll probably need a minimum of three and if I need more than four then I can always scrape together a 2-channel device from somewhere. The second is that I just don't believe that two channels of gate warrant a full 1u of rack width because there is little ergonomic benefit to having the gate controls in line — it's not like we're talking about a channel strip.

I like multichannel compressors for different reasons. We all need gain reduction in quantity but compression is used as a flavouring and you don't always want to be tying up your best six channels



of compression on stuff that only really requires a clamping down and controlling influence. I like to have a quantity of jobbing compressors that I can apply in a variety of different ways. That's not to say that they need to be ordinary, I don't like ordinary, but one of my favourite bulk compressors is the excellent KT SquareOne Dynamics. That box actually combines compression with gating — I actually prefer for the sake of flexibility to have these processes separated — which is exactly what the DN530 and DN540 offer.

These are handsome looking quad boxes with an impeccable finish and a wonderful colour scheme. They are heavier than I thought they'd be. A look around the back reveals that there's a certain amount of shared metal work with the two holes blanked off on the compressor being employed for the side chain solo circuit on the gate. Other than that both units have balanced XLR I-Os for each channel and TRS jack sockets for the sidechain access.

Let's start with the DNS530 gate which is made up of four identical and independent gate sections. You get six knobs, two switches and a some LED metering. There's fully variable Threshold (-50 to +25), Attack (30µs to 10ms), Release (2ms to 2s), Hold (2ms to 2s), and Range (infinity to 0dB). The final knob pertains to the DNS530's unique selling point that KT terms 'Accent' but you may recognise the principle by a different name on other brand units. Accent allows you to add up to 12dB of level effectively to the leading edge of the attack envelope — it's a type of gate overshoot with extra wellie. The activity of Accent is marked by the glowing of a blue LED on the left hand ladder, which conveniently is next to the Clip LED which you can light without too much trouble on Accented signals if you're not careful.

Accent is really only for percussion applications and serves as a good way of spicing up a lacklustre snare or kick, or making a great snare (and drummer) sound marvellous. However, you've got to remind yourself that it can be turned off as it's a little addictive. Use with moderation. There are also LEDs for Gate Shut, Release status, Hold status and the all-important over Threshold light. This is a very informative metering arrangement that took me a while to appreciate initially as it's different to what I am used to. A switch for Ducking turns the gating

process on its head and there's a Bypass Switch; both have accompanying LEDs.

Next to each gate section is a small Sidechain panel that contains a switchable bandpass Frequency pot that is sweepable from 40Hz to 16kHz. There are switches for activating the external sidechain input and one that Solos the section.

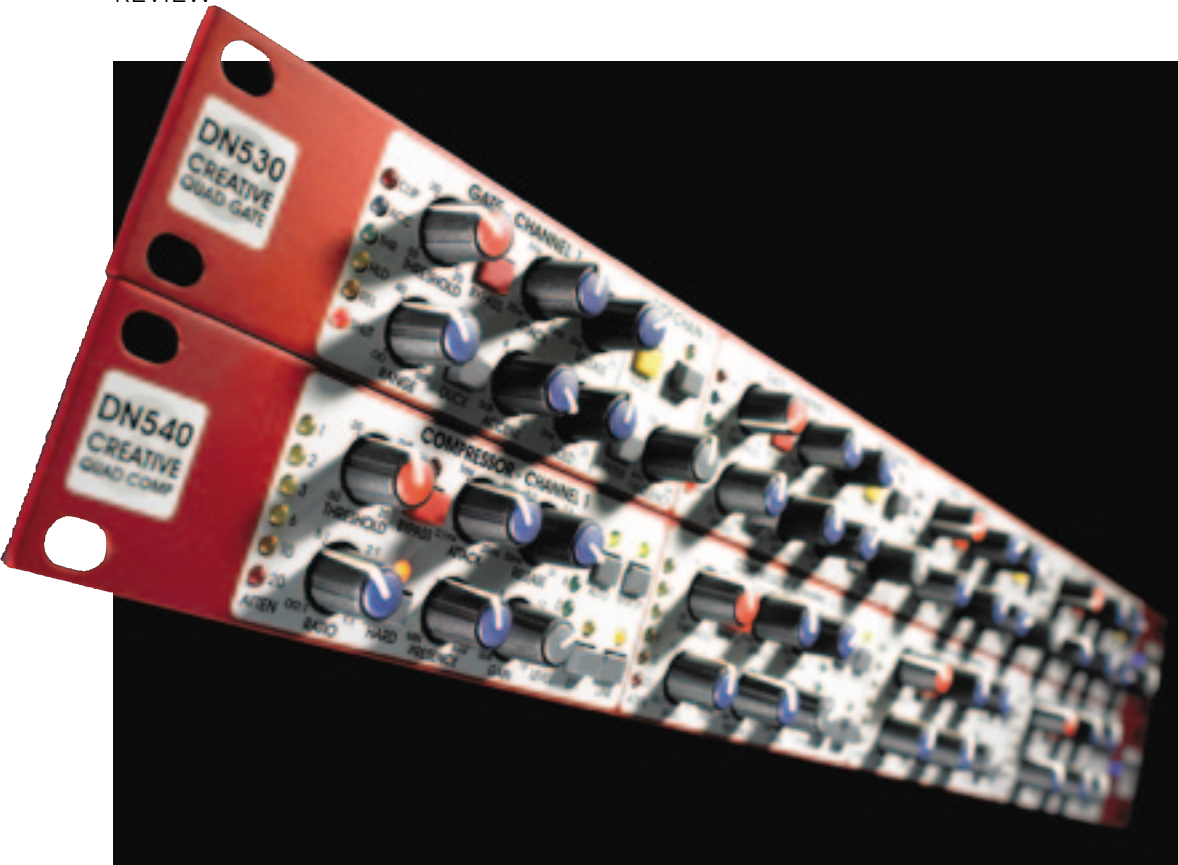
This is a gate that is hard to trip up and it has enough variability to cover all bases. I like to test gates on spoken word as you get an immediate intelligibility measure of what the thing can do. Accent is a handy percussion feature but I might have preferred a lower maximum level as I found it hard to apply anywhere near full throttle on any signals I was using. A lower maximum would also theoretically give you finer resolution on the Accent pot's travel.

Good gate though, highly tuneable and professionally presented with great LED indication.

The DN540 compressor is arranged in a broadly similar manner and again each of the four channel sections has six knobs. You get Threshold (-50 to +25), Attack (0.1ms to 20ms), Release (50ms to 2s), Ratio (1:1 to infinity) and 18dB of makeup Gain. The Compressor's unique selling point is the inclusion of a Presence pot that when applied reduces gain reduction of the mid-highs while leaving the rest of the spectrum compression in tact. It's a bit like a de-esser in reverse and is targeted clearly at vocal processing so you can retain some of the intelligibility when you're needing to compress more than a little.

You have to apply it carefully because the more compression you're using on a signal the more relatively dramatic is the effect of bringing out the upper mids on the Presence pot — particularly as upper mids is where you'll also find any noise in the signal. I think the best results are achieved on lower ratio settings as you'll get to use more of the full travel of the Presence pot. It can be subtle and is certainly applicable in this manner to studio work. It's interesting that this effect can also be used on stereo programme (a Link switch couples the channel to the one on the right) to give a tad of brightness to a mix. Now all I need is for the Presence pot to be tuneable for frequency and bandwidth..

Metering shows gain reduction to the left and output (switchable to input) on the right. Curve characteristic can be switched from soft to hard knee,



there's a Bypass and a button that asks the sidechain to look to the rear panel socket. Finally there's a button for a rather intelligent Auto mode that does what you'd expect with the attack and release times while referencing to your threshold and ratio settings. Auto performance is frequently the best indicator of a

well sorted compressor.

There's plenty to be playing with on the DN540 and the performance is good. It's not steeped in compression character but it is certainly able to do a passable impression of the needles flat trick. It's best at low to medium ratio restraint where its class

shines though. Again, as with the Accent maybe the maximum value of the Presence pot is a little too high for most applications although you are of course not obliged to use it all.

All told these are remarkably able boxes. Of the two, the compressor gets me a little more excited but then it's hard to get wound up about a fancy electronic switch at my age. Both deliver exceptionally solid performance in a fuss-free manner using pots and switches that feel good and are well arranged. I am even more convinced that two-channel gates makes no operational sense when you can get such simple and approachable access to all the controls you would ever need in double the density.

People will inevitably make comparisons between the DN530 and DN540 and the DN500 series units, which I am not familiar with. However, to me it is clear that these new units are a far more modern and immediate presentation of these audio essentials. Things have moved on quite substantially in user's expectations of dynamic control and these 'creative' units better reflect that. They each have an interesting feature twist of their own and you know that you won't have to worry about them once they're in your rack; they'll run and run. A good investment in my book, I'm impressed. ■

PROS

Solid performance from both units; build quality and looks; Accent control on the DN530; Presence control on the DN540.

CONS

Accent can make signals very hot; Presence needs sympathetic use.

Contact

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