

# SPL Track One

## Recording Channel



## A Channel One without the valve for little over half the price? Seeing (and hearing) is believing...

Paul White

**S**PL's Track One voice channel is a pared down version of their Channel One unit that we reviewed in November 2000. By leaving out the tube and some of the less mainstream features, SPL have managed to squeeze the Track One into a 1U package without compromising the inherent quality of the audio path. If you need paper proof, the frequency response is -3dB at 10Hz and 200kHz, with a dynamic range of 115dB and an impressively low noise floor.

The Track One comprises a preamp, de-esser, compressor (with switchable limiting mode), and three-band EQ. As with the Channel One, the control layout is deceptively simple, due to the automation of functions such as the compressor attack and release. A link jack with master/slave switching enables two units to be linked for stereo operation and there's the option of adding a plug-in digital interface card capable of outputting all the common flavours up to

24-bit, 96kHz (the same card as can be fitted to the Channel One). There's also the option of specifying a Lundahl input transformer. A horizontal bar-graph metering system shows the output level and the amount of gain reduction.

The preamp has switchable phantom power and low-cut filter with both mic and line/instrument inputs located on the back panel. Gain is controlled via a single knob, while buttons select between the various inputs. The balanced output is on both XLRs and jacks with a further jack enabling two Track Ones to share one converter card. A Ground Lift button is also fitted.

The input stage is followed by SPL's de-esser, which is unusual in that it doesn't

LEDs show signal present, clip and the activity of the de-esser.

### In Use

The Track One is really fast to set up, and the controls are so intelligently designed that it's almost impossible to get it to sound bad. It also has a quiet, transparent mic preamp that compares well with esoteric models costing rather more. SPL's de-esser design is the most effective I've tried, with minimal side-effects, and the one-knob compressor is equally impressive — it controls levels and flatters gently without colouring the sound. The limiter is nearly invisible-sounding unless you force it way beyond what is reasonable.

The EQ is just as good as the de-esser and



need a threshold control. Only the sibilant region of the audio spectrum is filtered out during de-essing, so side-effects are minimal. A single control adjusts the amount of de-essing required, and the de-esser, compressor and EQ stages all have individual bypass buttons.

The switchable, soft-knee compressor/limiter features Compression and Make-up controls. This is an extremely low-distortion design where the attack and release automatically adapt to the signal.

The compressor feeds into a three-band equaliser section, similar to that used in the Channel One — the main differences are the cut/boost range and omission of the Distortion control. The sweepable low and mid-range bands have gain ranges of  $\pm 14$ dB and  $\pm 12$ dB, and frequency ranges of 30Hz to 720Hz and 650Hz to 13.7kHz, respectively. The high end is serviced by the Air control, a gentle coil/capacitor filter providing 10dB of cut or boost centred at around 17.5kHz. An output level control provides from 20dB of cut to 6dB of gain, with PPM metering for both output level and gain reduction. Additional

compressor and is cleverly optimised for vocals with the minimum number of controls. The Air control opens out the high end to add transparency and detail without any sign of roughness. Although you don't get the subtle tube flavouring of the Channel One, the sound shares the same effortless transparency.

Overall, the Track One is extremely easy to use and it makes creating an expensive sound almost too easy. There really is a difference between a good mic pre like this and one which just 'does the job', so if you can't stretch to a Channel One, the Track One won't disappoint. Combine it with a halfway decent capacitor mic, point it at someone who can sing and the job's as good as done. **SO5**

### SOUND ON SOUND

#### SPL Track One £699

##### pros

- Really easy to use.
- Classy, effortless sound.

##### cons

- You can compress or limit, but not both at once.

##### summary

The Track One comes very close to the Channel One sound at a significantly lower price, and successfully combines high quality with operational simplicity.

### Information

- E** Track One, £699; 24-bit/96kHz digital output option, £388. Prices include VAT.
- T** Pure Distribution +44 (0)20 7328 0660.
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