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Avalon 737

quote

by Glenn Bucci » Tue Jan 20, 2015 9:25 pm

Avalon 737 SP

The Avalon 737 is one of the first channel strip boxes that were designed that was released in the late 1990's. When it came out, it received rave reviews from numerous engineers, and artist, and it still used today on a lot of session work heard on the radio. However there have been several new pre's and channel strips that have come out since then with bigger and punchier sounds. Many also have impedance and iron controls for added flexibility. I figured it was time to take a look at the 737 SP, and see how it matches up against the new guys on the block.

When the 737 came out around 1998, it had ugly purple plastic knobs which many did not care for. Thankfully Avalon updated the unit by putting higher grade aluminum knobs, and also increased the mic input transformer level with the SP (Special Performance) model. Since this release, Producer Baby Face wanted his 737 compressor to have a faster attack, and Avalon updated his unit. For years now all 737SP's have the faster attack. It is one of the best looking channels strips out there.

The 737 SP combines a tube pre, optic compressor, and a 4 band EQ in a 2U space. In looking at the front panel starting from the left, there is a preamp gain, instrument input, input control knobs that gives an option of line, instrument, or mic. There are push buttons for high gain, phase, phantom power, and filter. The high pass filter has a knob that starts from 30 Hz and goes to 140 Hz. Avalon also has recall sheets that can be helpful in remembering your settings. DAW's like Nuendo/Cubase have a note section for each channel, where you can write information about the track including your settings on compressors and EQ.

In regards to the mic pre, it utilizes two cascaded dual vacuum tube triodes configured with minimum negative feedback. The pre has a clean but smooth sound that is very pleasant. In comparison with my Neve Portico, the 737 pre is more even sounding and not as big. I also compared it to the Tube Channel on the new Manley TNT which is basically a Slam pre. The Manley had more depth than the 737 and a more articulate sound. The 737 had more of a textured sound in comparison. While this is all subjective, I like the sound of the 737 pre, but on its own, it lacks some of the punch or sparkle that many other pre's have. Thankfully the 737 does not stop there.

After the pre is a very nice optic compressor. I found up to -3db it performed wonderfully on vocal tracks and it did not alter the sound of the performer. The compressor was able to control the peaks and help give a very even performance. As you start to use more compression, the smooth character starts to get stronger in a very pleasant way. I found myself liking the attack on the fast side, and ratio on about 4 on vocals. Like most optic limiters, they excel on vocals and acoustic instruments, but many times are not fast enough to handle fast transients. This held to be true with the 737 as well. But that is studios have more than one compressor as each has their own purpose. Generally it's best not to use too much compression at the tracking stage. If you over compress at the tracking stage, you can't fix it later on. Its better to make changes when hearing it in a full mix at the mixing stage.

After the compressor is the 4 band EQ, that is more on the transparent side. I like using a clean EQ when you have a tube pre. The reason is the pre already has a smooth sound, and this EQ allows

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you to alter the frequencies without changing the real character of the pre. The EQ allowed much flexibility in giving more sparkle, depth, bass, or a nice cut in the middle on vocals, while at the same time keeping the pre's character. I have to admit if the unit did not have the EQ, I would be more drawn a lot more to the cleaner and more top end sparkle Avalon 2022, or M5 (single channel). However this EQ (which is better than any clean EQ plug in I heard), allows you to sculpt the sound of your source and get that right sound you're looking for.

So how does the 737 SP hold up against the current competition? I would say very well indeed. Good enough that it made me quite sad to return the unit.



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