

**NIGEL PALMER picks up a surprising tip from an Internet forum, which leads him to discover a compressor seemingly without fault.**

Internet audio forums often attract criticism and it's easy to see why, with too much uninformed opinion from anonymous posters apparently aged about fourteen. However, there's also an upside: the better-run boards (such as Brad Blackwood's Mastering Demystified at prosoundweb.com, where real names are de rigueur) often have contributions from people of experience that genuinely inform the rest of us, and one of the most useful aspects is the way new ideas and products can be flagged. That's how I first got to hear about the VSC-2 Quad Discrete Compressor from the German company Vertigo Sound, an analogue unit that's caused considerable interest since coming on to the market last year.

## In Use

I hooked the unit up to my mastering rig as a straight replacement for my usual analogue compression, and the first word that came to mind on using the Vertigo was 'classy': the sound of the compressor is exemplary and has a lovely silky quality, though it's not afraid to assert itself with second harmonic colouration when using the Make Up control combined with gain reduction. I was struck by the fact that, as with some of the better compressors, any given program material had a range of settings that could be employed, thus handing control back to the operator to make the most appropriate choices for the application. I also noticed that with some of the gentler settings (especially when using the Soft ratio), you might



# VERTIGO SOUND VSC-2

## QUAD DISCRETE COMPRESSOR

### Overview

The 'Quad' in the name refers to the VSC-2's use of four discrete VCAs (voltage controlled amplifiers) as its main control elements, one in the audio path, and one in the sidechain of each of the compressor's two channels. The blue front panel is easy on the eye and clear in operation: to the left are two rows of five knobs, one row per channel, consisting of Threshold, Ratio, Attack, Release and Make Up – Threshold and Make Up are continuous pots, and the others are stepped for repeatability. Threshold offers a wide range from -22 to +22dBu, with a 'zoomed in' area from -6 to +6 dBu where most work is likely to occur; Ratio starts with Soft (described in the manual as a Tip Toe function different to the more common Soft Knee) where compression begins very gently and increases with level to 8:1. The other ratios, which have an increasingly hard knee, are 2, 4, 8, and 10:1, and finally Brick, a 40:1 limit function. The unit's Attack settings step from 0.1 milliseconds to 30ms, the Release going from 100ms to 1.2 seconds plus a program-dependent Auto mode. Make Up gives up to 22dBu of boost to the signal and progressively colours the sound, a versatile addition to the VSC-2's bag of tricks.

To the right of the knobs are two switches to either engage processing on each channel or hardwire bypass, and next to these are a pair of illuminated gain reduction meters with three further switches beneath to access the unit's stereo linkage and sidechain filters: in Stereo mode only the channel A (left) knobs operate, becoming masters for both left and right, channel B's controls being switched off; both sidechains are still active, however, with the highest peaks in either channel triggering compression in both. The filtering has been well implemented, and is individually switchable to provide a rolloff at either 60 or 90Hz in the sidechain so that the compressor becomes less sensitive to compression triggered by low frequency content, and therefore reduces 'pumping' as the lows are allowed to pass. A chunky mains switch completes the front-panel features, and round the back things are sparse but functional with a mains input and fuse, together with ins and outs for each channel on XLR connectors.

### THE REVIEWER

NIGEL PALMER has been a freelance Sound Engineer and Producer for over 20 years. He runs his CD mastering business, Lowland Masters ([www.lowlandmasters.com](http://www.lowlandmasters.com)) from rural Essex where he lives with his family and two dogs.

think the compressor was doing very little, until bypassing it and realising that much more was going on than you'd thought. The VSC-2 is a very effective dynamic controller – I found the Attack control in particular to be a powerful tool, and I don't think I've come across a compressor where the level of transients one lets through or not could be dialled in quite so simply. I took to the meters too as, unlike some compressors where significant gain reduction may occur with no meter deflection, with these as soon as I could hear compression I could also generally see it, a useful visual feedback as long as the 'ears before eyes' principle was observed.

After a few happy days using the compressor I passed it over to local mix engineer Simon Gogerly, a Grammy award winner for his work with U2, to get his opinion. Simon also enjoyed the unit, saying 'I liked the clear high-quality sound, which can be either clean or punchy – I also liked the versatility of the sidechain filters, and if I didn't already have a few VCA options I'd probably want to buy one'.

### Conclusion

I unashamedly loved this compressor, although once again quality costs. The company's attention to detail both sonically and with the user interface is impressive, and about the only caveat I can come up with apart from the price is that the large switches could be vulnerable to being knocked, so nothing of significance. I look forward to hearing more from this company – there's an extension unit on the way offering parallel compression and MS stereo for example – and declare the Vertigo VSC-2 'highly recommended'.

### INFORMATION

RRP: €3,940.00 (exc.VAT)

- Vertigo Sound Germany, Walkürenstr.21, 82110 Germering
- +49-89-856369-27
- +49-89-840617-53
- [www.vertigosound.com](http://www.vertigosound.com)
- [contact@vertigosound.com](mailto:contact@vertigosound.com)