

Daking FET Compressor II

These units are well thought of in the US but have been surprisingly low profile on this side of the Atlantic until relatively recently. Now mildly retweaked in an updated version, **GEORGE SHILLING** finds it hard to put it down.



GEOFFREY DAKING PLAYED in the successful New York 1960s band Blues Magoos before taking an interest in engineering and recording. His career has included designing and building studios, and stints as chief engineer at top NY rooms. In the early 90s he designed and began to market outboard units that are highly regarded, if a little less than commonplace this side of the pond. Subsequently, consoles of various sizes have also appeared.

Daking has drawn from the history of great studio equipment, delving inside classics from API, Neve, and particularly Trident, taking the best of those designs and building modern equivalents, with a no-compromise approach. No valves have been harmed in the making of these units — Daking is a firm believer in solid state technology. He cites the fact that 'there are no large vacuum tube consoles', and it's true that there have been many great solid-state consoles. Furthermore, none of these 'greats' used ICs, and Daking also steadfastly refuses to employ them, preferring discrete components for Class A amplifier circuitry.

Daking's small range of outboard has been updated to incorporate a number of changes, although the mono FET Compressor II looks little different to its predecessor and the updates to this unit are relatively minor.

The 1U fascia hides a rather smaller than normal stainless steel case, beautifully constructed, with braces attaching to the rackmounting front panel. On the rear are Neutrik Combo connectors for jack or XLR connection to the line input and stereo link and XLR line out. In the centre is a 25-pin D connector for the power supply that seems like at least 20 pins more than is necessary, but the cable attaches securely with thumbscrews to the external PSU. This is a chunky and fairly heavy thing to have to hide behind your rack, but it will power up to four Daking units simultaneously and the supplied D-connector power cable is plenty long enough for most situations. It is now supplied free with all Daking products.

Meanwhile back at the compressor, quality of design and construction is very apparent. The businesslike aluminium machined knobs are an in-house design, they seem slightly smoother-finished than I remember on the previous model, and the pointers are clear in any light. The pointer line does not continue down the side of the barrel, but it's not necessary here with all controls switched. The panel has a classic dark green-grey background, but the white legending doesn't stand out enough. This is due, I suspect, to the otherwise very attractive polycarbonate coating that protects the screen printing.

It all looks very smart, but the impression is also slightly let down by the meter which looks like it has been pilfered from the school science lab and unceremoniously glued onto the front. There is not even a backlight — oddly there is nothing whatsoever that lights up this front panel, so the only way to check for power is to switch the meter toggle to its central GR position to see if the meter zeroes. The meter can also indicate Input or Output level, and its ugliness is soon forgiven when in use — it displays gain reduction very clearly. The other toggle selects between In, Stereo Link and Bypass, the last of these is not a hardware bypass but rather removing the feed to the compressor's sensor circuit.

Threshold switches from -10 to +10dB in 2dB steps, just about enough range, as long as you have full control of level from the preceding device. Ratio is selectable from 1.5:1, 2:1, 3:1, 5:1, 10:1 and 20:1 — a useful range of choice. The nine-position Attack knob ranges from 250 microseconds to 64 milliseconds — each step along is double the previous setting. This is pretty much all you'll ever need, although I did occasionally wonder what a slower attack might be like on certain sources, such as acoustic guitar — I'm normally a sucker for fast attack and release, but 250 microseconds is plenty fast enough for me!

There are three fixed Release settings of 0.5, 1 and 1.5 seconds, followed by a selection of Auto settings that emulate some classic compressors' two-stage recovery settings. While three fixed settings sounds like not enough, in practice these cover most eventualities, with the fastest great for percussion and other instruments, the middle setting good for most programme material, and the slowest great for vocals and instruments.

First of the auto settings is the Neve 33609, a classic broadcast programme compressor. This is a well-rounded and warm setting, relatively slow, and quite pleasant on vocals, although with a tendency to 'pump' with percussive signals. Next along is the Compex setting, based on the Audio Design design. This has a faster initial release and sounds a bit crunchier than the 33609. It is terrific on drum ambience and programme material — I'd imagine that with a pair of these, you'd have a great stereo mix buss compressor. This is probably my favourite setting, I loved the Compex on percussive sounds.

However, the final two settings are also excellent, based on settings 5 and 6 of the Fairchild 660/670. The second stage of position 6 is ludicrously long, but these are both useful settings to have available. The Make-Up Gain is in 1dB steps from zero to 11dB. On the older version of this unit, this would stay in circuit in Bypass mode. On this unit it doesn't, but there is an internal board to select either mode of operation, and this can be added to the original model with a US\$35 kit.

This compressor has a big, warm yet clean tone, and the sound remains somehow transparent, bright and detailed even when using heavy compression. It lacks the colouration of a 670 or the honk and wail of an 1176, behaving more like a grown-up brother — a little more sophisticated and sensible! Butch Vig and the Lord-Alge brothers are fans of Daking units, and I'm not surprised. This is really top-class. ■

Contact

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PROS	Big, warm, clean Class A FET Compression.
CONS	No lights; poor legending.
EXTRAS	The Daking Mic-Pre IV offers four channels of class A preamp in 1U with an outboard power supply. Configured for four mic inputs or four line inputs from Neutrik combi jacks on the back plus four line inputs (+10 to -50) or 1/4-inch hi-Z instrument inputs on the front, the Mic-Pre IV has transformer-balanced I-Os.

Each input offers variable gain, a 20-segment LED level meter with +24dB peak indicator, switchable mic/line or hi-z instrument, switchable +48V phantom power, switchable input phase and switchable 20dB pad.