Mac | **PC** | What is it? Modelled API EQ and compressor plug-ins | **PRICE: £735**

CONTACT: Sonic Distribution, 0845 500 2500   **WWW:** www.waves.com   **INFO:** TDM version, £1463

AUTO GAIN
Like many other compressors, the 2500 features an auto-gain make-up circuit, but you can also select manual operation

LINK
Unusually, the 2500 allows you to fine-tune the 'strength' of the stereo link

POLARITY
A polarity switch, to invert the phase

SCALES
The 550 EQs have a highlighted scale, so you can easily see which frequency is selected and how much gain is applied

TONE
The 2500's real hidden weapon is the Tone section, offering many behavioural tweaks

SIGNAL FILTER
Like the original, the 550A has a band-pass filter option to reject everything outside 50Hz-15kHz

ANALOG
Waves' Analog feature models the noise characteristics of the original analogue units

EQ TYPE
Although the 550A is the simplest of the EQs, you can still choose between shelf and bell types for the lower/upper bands

SLIDERS
The 560's sliders offer accurate gain adjustments and proportional Q characteristics

AUTO TRIM
This changes the output level based on the prevailing signal

WAVES
API Collection

There's no stopping Waves, as they continue to mine a rich seam of tasty analogue emulations, this time digging up the sound of classic API EQ and compression modules…

▶ SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

PC: Intel P4 2.8GHz/AMD Athlon 64, 512MB RAM, Windows XP SP2 (No Vista support yet)
Mac: G5 Dual 2GHz/Intel Core Duo 1.83GHz, 512MB RAM, OS X 10.4.8

▶ TEST SYSTEM

Mac: Apple Mac Pro Dual 3GHz, 3GB RAM, OS X 10.4.9, Logic Pro 7.2

On the DVD

AUDIO DEMOS
On the disc you'll find a demo WAV and a text file explaining what you're hearing

When Waves introduced their SSL Collection some 18 months ago, it marked a turning point for plug-in packages. There were plenty of analogue emulations around, but nothing quite like this one, and certainly nothing badged with the SSL logo (apart from SSL's own LMC-1 freebie). Since then they've launched their V-Series, which emulates vintage Neve gear (although it wasn't officially endorsed), and they now return with the fully-backed API Collection. Clearly, plug-in endorsement has become big business.

Automated Processes Inc may not have quite the same ring to their name as SSL or Neve, but they do have a 40-year history of making high-end audio consoles and outboard gear. Their desks are probably more popular in the US than the UK, although a few UK music studios (RAK in London, for example) have championed their use.

Smile – it's API

However, far more commonplace are their outboard racks. Typically found in portable boxes, the so-called 'API lunchbox' is an excellent nugget of EQ, compression and mic amplification that will bring a smile to the face of even the most hardened audiophile engineer.

In keeping with the original hardware's modular style, the Waves API collection features three of the most respected modules: the 550A 3-Band EQ, 550B 4-Band EQ and 560 10-Band Graphic. Completing the package is their modern-day rack format 2500 Stereo Compressor. All four plug-ins come in mono and stereo forms (yes, even the "Stereo Compressor"!), and in typical Waves style, they cover most formats and platforms: TDM, RTAS, Audiosuite, VST and AU are all here, though there are no DirectX or MAS versions.

Like other Waves modelled plug-ins, they have the 'Analog' option. For completeness, this replicates the noise of the original unit and defaults to the On position. With previous releases, we've found the difference

this switch makes to be negligible, and it's obviously far outweighed by the main guts of the emulation. Also common to all is the familiar Waves GUI system with its A/B comparison and easy selection and manipulation of multiple parameters. This means the API plug-ins handle their preset library from within their interfaces, which avoids host-specific problems.

Knobby styles

The three 500 series modules are all EQs, representing the early development of the API sound. For the 550A and 550B, this means combo knobs with notched gain in 2 or 3dB steps, and notched frequencies, with some of the bands offering selectable bell or shelving options. The 550B augments the pretty basic 550A with an extra band, but also with much greater crossover between bands. This means that for many frequencies you can boost or cut twice, and this certainly makes up for the less than stellar 12dB gain circuitry.

"THE API COLLECTION DELIVERS MUCH OF THE FLAVOUR OF THE ORIGINALS BUT WITH THE BENEFITS OF A PLUG-IN"

Like a few classic EQs, the APIs have 'proportional Q' characteristics, where the Q changes with the amount of gain. In use, this can be really obvious and – just as with the original units – hitting the 'quarter past' point on the gain knob (ie, 6dB) can be

quite a revelation.

Originally released in 1967, the 560 Graphic takes a slightly different approach with its continuously variable gain sliders. Obviously, frequencies are fixed, but with one-octave spacing, this one sounds

extremely sweet. Again, Q is proportional to gain, but with 0.1dB resolution on the sliders, there's a smoother transition than on the 550s.

In contrast to the EQs, the 2500 compressor looks quite complex. Things start off pretty standard, with

Tone it up

The API 2500 Stereo Compressor incorporates quite a few interesting options, including various stereo linking features, but it's the so-called Tone controls that are the most intriguing.

First up, there are three knee characteristics – hard, medium and soft – which affect the onset of compression as the signal passes the threshold. Next up, there's the Thrust parameter, with normal, medium and loud settings. For the latter two, this modifies the sidechain signal, applying an EQ curve so that the compression is less influenced by lower frequencies and more influenced by high frequencies. Finally, there's the compression type, offering feedback and feed-forward options, labelled respectively as Old and New. The Old format takes the sidechain from the post-compressed signal, the New form takes it from the pre-compressed one.

In use, this creates an amazing array of compression behaviour. The Old and New types serve up either the

▲ A wealth of compression options at your fingertips

gentle 'glue' of a classic rack compressor, or the much more responsive release of a modern VCA design. It's the Thrust control that's the most extreme, though, with both its medium and loud settings making an amazing difference, allowing quite extreme compression while retaining low-end punch.

the usual foursome of attack, release, threshold and ratio controls. But move on to the Tone and Link sections and things get decidedly more esoteric (see *Tone it up* boxout). Unusually for a stereo compressor, the whole thing is topped off with an automatic gain make-up circuit, although this can be switched to manual, if you prefer.

In use, the wealth of different processing options makes for an almost Jekyll and Hyde compressor, capable of anything from gentle mix glue to twitchy sonic destruction. But because these differences are a button press away, a clear starting point is always easy to achieve. And the excellent meters are some of the most responsive we've seen on a software compressor.

Good behaviour

The big question with any modelled plug-in is whether it gets close to achieving what the original hardware does. This isn't just about the sound, but about the way it behaves in general. The API Collection is surprisingly good, managing to deliver much of the flavour of the originals, but with the benefits of a plug-in. In addition, there are lots of nice touches, ranging from highlighted knob legends to auto output trim, and, of course, excellent meters throughout. Alas, for AU and VST users there's no external sidechain for the 2500, and, being faithful emulations of classic gear, they're not as flexible as some entirely modern-day plug-ins.

Overall, the bundle offers a bit of something old and a bit of something new, and does at times feel like a slightly strange combo of the clinical and the musical. Even so, it's one of the best emulative bundles we've used, and if you have an iLok we recommend downloading the seven-day trial version. **cm**

◄ These are the original API hardware EQs that the software is modelled on

⏻ VERDICT

FOR
+ Very flexible 2500 compressor
+ Vintage flavour EQs
+ Responsive meters
+ Easy-to-use interface
+ Great-sounding graphic EQ

AGAINST
– Expensive
– No external sidechain for AU/VST users

The API Collection is right up there with Waves' excellent V-Series and SSL 4000 bundles. The price is right up there, too, but do bear in mind that it's still a far cheaper option than the API hardware equivalents

RATING

9