



Universal Audio Chandler Limited Curve Bender

£229



Three industry heavyweights team up to release a plugin model of a classic passive EQ with a complicated past...

> Developed by Softube, Curve Bender is a plugin emulation (VST/AU/AAX/RTAS) of Chandler's rebuild of the classic EMI TG12345 stereo passive console EQ (see *Bending curves*) for UAD-2/Apollo, designed for mastering but also viable for mixing situations. Its two channels are linked by default, but can be unlinked to work in dual mono mode, and, as a software-exclusive addition, there's also a Mid/Side mode, with the left-hand controls processing the mid signal and the right-hand controls working on the side. Annoyingly, switching from Stereo to M/S mode (and back) doesn't automatically unlink (and relink) the two channels - you have to hit the Link button as well.

Curve Bender is a four-band semi-parametric EQ with additional Low and High Pass Filters (each offering a choice of 11 cutoff frequencies), and shelf and bell options on the Low and High bands. 'Semi-parametric' refers to the lack of discrete Q control, although each frequency band includes a Multiply switch for extending the cut/boost gain range from ± 7.5 dB to ± 7.5 dB that also kicks in a narrower Q when engaged.

The Frequency and Gain controls are all stepped, the former having eight centre frequencies per band (except Low, which has seven), and the latter ten steps (in 0.5 or 0.75dB increments, depending on the setting of the Multiply switch).

Bypassing a band is done by setting its Frequency selector knob or Multiply switch to Out. The second is by far the easiest of the two, and makes us wonder why they didn't ditch the other one for the plugin.

Bend me, shape me

Designed for the broad brushstroke tonal adjustments of the mastering engineer, not surgical EQ work, the original Curve Bender hardware is known for its 'mojo' rather than its precision, and the plugin captures that perfectly, its passive design enabling mid and high bands to be boosted without introducing the creeping abrasive distortion associated with active EQs. A Presence boost in the x1 Gain range (ie, with the broader Q) jumps the track out at you in a perky yet still very smooth way; while a top-end shelving boost brings a glossy professional sheen to the mix with no hint of edginess. The lower bands aren't quite as impressive, introducing little discernible richness or character, but are still useful for adding weight or broad scooping of the lower mids.

The x1.5 Multiply setting, with its narrower Q, essentially turns Curve Bender into a low-precision tracking and mixing EQ, allowing you to tune into particular frequencies with a bit more accuracy. Of course, in an ideal world there would be separate Q knobs, not to mention continuous Frequency selectors...

Curve Bender combines the broad tonal control of a self-assured mastering EQ with an attractive character that always seems to effortlessly resonate with the music being processed. Much like the old Neve EQs, a mix just has to be touched by it to sound better. The M/S facility and extended gain range with dual Q settings broaden its appeal to the mastering fraternity, and overall it unarguably deserves a place at the top table of mastering EQs. **cm**

Web www.uaudio.com

Alternatively

Waves EMI TG12345

N/A » N/A » \$249

Models the original EMI console EQ rather than the Chandler rack version

Brainworx bx_digital V3

N/A » N/A » \$299

A highly involved mastering EQ, and one of the first to introduce M/S processing

Verdict

For Excellent mastering EQ

Brings excitement to the presence range

Silky, airy top-end

Mid/Side mode for discrete vocal work

Extra gain and narrow Q add precision

Against Narrow Q mode occasionally a bit too narrow

Unnecessary Out setting on the Frequency selector knobs

A stunning mastering EQ that only suffers slightly from the limitations of its overly authentic control emulation

Bending curves

'Curvebender' was originally the nickname given to the RS56 Universal Tone Control, developed by EMI engineers at Abbey Road in 1951. The name, and nothing more, was taken by Chandler Limited when they released their updated version of the EMI TG12345 console EQ to mark the 75th anniversary of Abbey Road studios in 2006. It's the Chandler version that's been modelled and updated here.

The original EMI hardware was famously used by The Beatles during the recording of

Abbey Road, and Pink Floyd for *Dark Side of the Moon*, and is sought-after for the vibe and colour it introduces, particularly in the upper frequency bands. The Chandler hardware successfully recreated that character, and this plugin version does the same. Unlike for example, the Manley Massive Passive, which could be described as 'neutral' and 'functional', Curve Bender is intended as a 'musical' mastering EQ that you'd use for its idiosyncratic character.