

Softube **PC** **MAC**

# Trident A-Range EQ £135



You could be forgiven for doing a double take, but here's another virtual version of Trident's A-Range channel strip

> It was only two issues ago, in **cm149**, that we reviewed Universal Audio's recreation of the EQ section of a Trident A-Range console channel. Now there's another option for those seeking that particular EQ, courtesy of Softube.

The original desk featured a powerful inductor-based EQ design associated with the 'British' production sound of the time (think David Bowie and Marc Bolan). It also had distinctive fader-style gain controls, four frequency options per band and 'additive' high- and low-pass filters. Naturally, all these features have made it into the Softube version and although slightly different graphically from UAD's, the layout follows roughly the same pattern. In fact, the only obvious functional difference is Softube's inclusion of a saturation control.

The four-band EQ includes high and low shelving bands and two bell-shaped mid bands. There's a selection of four fixed frequencies per band and +/-15dB gain. The frequencies are fairly evenly spaced across all bands, but with emphasis in some key areas, so you get 50, 80 and 100Hz options for the low shelf, and 1, 2 and 3kHz options in the midrange. There's also some overlap between the high shelf (8kHz) and the high mid-range band (9kHz).

As mentioned, the high- and low-pass filters are 'additive', meaning that you can engage more than one to get different (and more extreme) behaviour. The other significant thing to note is that the EQ bands interact with each other. For example, even just selecting a different low mid-range frequency will affect the behaviour of the high mid-range band.

## Saturation station

Trident's original desk design did not include a saturation control. However, it did overload in a distinctive way when driven hard, and Softube have chosen to mimic this with their saturation feature. We found this very easy to use, as it's a



gain-compensated control (so no need to tweak input and output gains as you would on the desk itself). Its sound varied considerably depending on how hard we pushed it, and at subtle levels proved excellent at adding bite to snare hits and picked electric bass. At higher levels, it really began to compress the overall level and to sap the bottom end in exchange for top-end fizz. However, we found that, for creative effects, combining this with some heavy EQ worked pretty well.

The EQ itself is a powerful design, and pushing it hard achieves great results. We did, at first, find ourselves wondering why we were adding 15dB of 8kHz shelving boost to our bass guitar, but as ever with vintage designs, it's best to ignore the numbers and use your ears.

Up against modern, digital parametric EQs, the obvious limitation here is the fixed frequency design. While this makes the EQ less flexible, we found that combining the low cut filters with an EQ boost still offered plenty of capabilities for shaping, say, a bass drum or the low mids in an acoustic guitar.

Softube have done an excellent job here, and their emulation sounds the part while being easy on the CPU. The EQ itself is of the same caliber as UA's, but the inclusion of a saturation control adds a desirable extra dimension. **cm**

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**Info** TDM version, £277

## System requirements

**PC** PIII CPU, 512MB RAM, Windows XP/Vista/7, VST/RTAS host, iLok

**Mac** G4/G5/Intel CPU, 512MB RAM, OS X 10.4, VST/AU/RTAS host, iLok

## Alternatively

### UA Trident A Range EQ

**cm150 >> 8/10 >> \$249**

Sounds great but has no saturation control and is for UAD users only

### PSP Audioware sQuad

**cm138 >> 9/10 >> \$297**

A suite of five native EQs, some based on vintage designs

## The same but different

**It's unusual to find an officially-endorsed plug-in emulation of exactly the same hardware coming from two different software designers. Obviously, the UA plug-in is DSP-powered (it requires a UAD card to work), while the Softube is native (and has an additional saturation control). They're also modelled on two different physical desks, but these issues aside, you'd expect them to be pretty close. So are they? First up, frequency behaviour. This**

**seems quite similar - however, our testing did reveal a slightly different gain scaling, with the Softube needing roughly 0.5dB less to achieve the same boost on each band. The Softube one has a slightly different gain range for the output control, too. Possibly the most interesting comparison was with completely flat settings, as inserting the Softube version resulted in a subtle cut in very high frequencies up towards 20kHz.**

## Verdict

**For** Powerful Trident EQ

'Bonus' saturation feature

Interesting interplay between bands

Additive high-/low-pass filters

CPU-efficient

**Against** Fixed frequencies are limiting

Yet more great virtual analogue hardware from Softube, this is emulation done right

**9/10**