



REVIEW

BY PAUL VNUK JR.

Radial Engineering PowerPre and Komit 500-Series Modules

Vintage sound and bold new design—
abound in this preamp and compressor

In our October 2011 issue, I had the pleasure of introducing Radial Engineering's new 8-slot 500-Series rack enclosure, the Workhorse, and started taking a detailed look at new 500-Series modules from Radial. In this issue, we move on to the Radial PowerPre and Komit Compressor. One is a very original Radial design, the other a reimagining of an old classic in a new form.

PowerPre

First up: the PowerPre. As with all of the modules in the line and reminiscent of Radial's uber-tough direct boxes, the PowerPre is fully enclosed in a steel housing. Its extra thick front panel is done in a classy baked enamel blue finish, and all of its buttons and switches are of the highest build quality.

It features +55 dB of gain, phantom power, highpass filter, phase reversal and a -1.5 dB pad. There is also a front-mounted XLR microphone input, a full 10-segment signal LED meter, and a 3-position voicing switch labeled VOX with a choice of Breath, Linear or Punch settings.

While most of this sounds fairly typical of a mic pre, other than perhaps the VOX switch, it's in the details where the PowerPre comes to life.

An old transformer gets new tricks

Radial is quick to point out that, sonically, this is not another Neve 10-Series wannabe, nor does it aspire to be like

any other famous preamp. It doesn't even perpetuate Radial's usual love affair with all things Jensen. Instead, the PowerPre is designed around an old Hammond broadcast transformer. Not "that" Hammond; rather, these transformers were most often found inside early broadcasting desks such as those by Ward-Beck. If you think of the deep, rich sound of vintage radio announcers, you will be in the ballpark of the PowerPre's sonic vibe.

Not content with just one tone, the VOX switch takes this rich solid sound of the Hammond transformer and gives you a pair of preset eq boosts. As you can guess, Breath adds a twinge of openness to the high-end, while Punch gives the lows a nice kick in the pants. The center section or Linear is the true unaltered sound of the circuit.

From AccuState to OmniPort

The word "linear" brings us conveniently to the unit's next feature, its AccuState output gain pot. This ultra-smooth pot plays upon Radial's problem-solving strengths, by tackling an inherent issue found in many mic preamps: Turning the gain pot often results in large, unnatural jumps in volume, especially the last 20% of many a pot's throw. In the past I have had much experience with said touchy volume pots, i.e. "Nothing... kinda something... little more... whoa, too much!"

Radial's proprietary design gives a detailed and even response across the spectrum, free of random jumps. The other half of the AccuState design is that it does so with very little self-noise. This is one quiet preamp, with a noise floor that only starts to become audible when used with low-volume dynamic mics and ribbons and pushed darn near close to +50 dB and above, i.e. the last 5% of the unit's throw.



It's surprisingly rare to find microphone preamps with even a clip LED these days, let alone 10-segment input metering, as such the PowerPre's input meter is most welcome.

And while many mic pres offer a high-pass filter, this one cuts a bit deeper than your standard 80 Hz version: it starts at 150 Hz and is 3 dB down at 100 Hz.

Unique to all of the Radial modules is the new OmniPort. This is a special $1/4$ " TRS jack located on the Workhorse that gives all Radial modules a special extra function, as detailed in the October 2011 issue. On the PowerPre, the OmniPort serves as a $1/2$ " instrument in, and gives the Power Pre additional DI status.

Test notes and conclusions

I would call the PowerPre full, solid and clean with a classy vintage sound; it falls nicely into the "classic console preamps" category and as such it stacks very well. The Breath switch adds a nice air to vocals as well as acoustic string instruments. It is more of a general openness than brightness. Punch is nice for bass, electric guitars, kick drum and toms for extra thump, but it is not heavy-handed or muddy. That said, however, whether on acoustic guitar, drums, voices or guitar cabs, I like the classy, full smoothness of the Linear setting the best.

This is a stellar, unique sounding preamp; a rack of 4-8 of these would serve any studio from project to pro very well. And that many channels isn't at all out of range; at \$499 street price the PowerPre is also one of the most affordable 500-Series preamps on the market: a great bonus!

