

Fatman (by TL Audio) 2Fat and Fat Funker

TL Audio has released the first two units in a new series of affordable Fatman branded products. Slim **GEORGE SHILLING** lets out his belt a few notches to take stock of the prospect.



JUST WHEN YOU thought your Christmas bingeing waistline had slimmed back to normal, along comes all the chocolate of Easter. And then these two, umm, Fatmen. The original Fatman series comprised a pair of uniquely-shaped boxes, priced to appeal to the lower end of the market, but including valve circuitry. These new models have dafter names, but conform to a more sensible format, being rather, yes, fatter 2U rackmounters.

These two are both complete recording channels. The 2Fat (UK£410 inc. VAT) is the simpler and cheaper of the pair, with instrument and mic preamp, and compressor with variable controls and function presets. This is an update of the original Fat 2 with bonuses including -30dB pad, a preset one-button 'Fat EQ', and a digital output option (this is also on the Fat Funker) with the DO-2 SPDIF card allowing up to 24-bit 96kHz resolution. The Fat Funker (UK£586 inc. VAT) claims to be oriented towards guitarists, but is clearly the better featured of the two, with many more knobs and a few more connections — could it be that the 2Fat is for drummers?

Despite the two units being designed for similar tasks, due to their development history, the control layouts, legending, and even some terminology is different between them. For example, Input selection and Meter switching are rotary controls on the Fat Funker but pushbuttons on the 2Fat.

The more expensive Fat Funker runs its valve circuitry at 150 volts, while the cheaper 2Fat is at 100 volts. Any sonic difference is very subtle, but when driven into overload the Fat Funker is slightly honkier. Both mic preamps sound full, with the opportunity to drive them (two LEDs illustrate the amount) for harmonic richness, or just slight enhancement from the valve circuitry at more sensible levels. They are not as polished sounding as more esoteric and expensive units, but are musical, and easily outperformed a more expensive British unit in terms of detail. Both include 90Hz 12dB/octave high pass filters which I expected to be too dramatic, but in practice were not and achieved a juicy, tight low-end.

2FAT — The 2Fat's rear panel is simplicity itself, with an XLR for mic input, and balanced TRS jacks for line input and output. The front panel's Instrument input takes priority over the rear connectors, and a switch chooses between the two rear inputs, or two different level settings for the instrument input. However, there was a bit less level available here compared to the Fat Funker's Guitar input, although this was still enough for the quietest single-coil guitar (just). A single Gain knob controls all input levels. The unique selling point with this box is the Program knob, which selects between 15 different presets. These govern all compressor settings based on particular instrument or vocal types. All the user needs to do is set Input gain to govern the overall amount of compression taking place. So it is useful to set the Meter to GR mode, and also to observe the Input section's Drive and Peak LEDs.

Threshold and Ratio are set according to programme, along with Attack, Release and Knee, so the only control still operational in the Compressor section is the Gain Make-Up knob, and using this or the Output knob means you can easily compensate for compression. The settings are great, and the compressor is very warm and sounds excellent for general purpose gain reduction. The Output level metering includes a +10dB option that drops the reading down 10dB, useful when you want to send more level into a DAW without bending the needle. The superb Fat EQ circuit adds a preset 'smiley' EQ — low end boost, mid cut and high end boost. It sounds great most of the time — it is not too overdone, but just adds a pleasant sweetness to many signals.

FAT FUNKER — The Fat Funker is essentially the same feature set as the popular TL Audio Ivory 5051. Guitarists such as Coldplay's Guy Berryman had started using the Ivory as a front end for live use and initially there were plans to optimise the unit for guitarists by tweaking the EQ and Compressor characteristics. However, following user tests, it was discovered that nothing needing altering, so the Fatman version is essentially a tool to relaunch the Fatman brand, with announcements at Frankfurt of

nine new Fatman MI and live products.

This unit loses the 2Fat's compressor presets and Fat EQ, but gains features elsewhere. The rear panel is more populated, with separate XLRs for Mic and Line, and a separate unbalanced jack line input on the rear. These line inputs share a +4/-10dB button. The Fat Funker's unbalanced insert TRS is slightly unusual in that it is not included in the signal path, but merely used as a sidechain for de-essing, etc. A useful Link jack enables stereo operation of the compressor with two units.

Apart from the loss of the presets, the Compressor includes similar controls to the 2Fat, but gains extra settings for Attack and Release, with four-position knobs for each, allowing a little more flexibility and more extreme settings — undoubtedly useful. A 4-band EQ section is included, with High and Low shelving and two peaking Mid bands, each band featuring four preset frequencies. It is sweet and musical, with great warmth. A simple one-knob Gate section is very easy to set up and has sensibly set time-constants. The cute little illuminated Meter gains a useful Input setting.

For anyone setting up a budget studio these are highly recommended. If you plump(!) for the Fat Funker, consider whether you prefer the deep red of this model or the creamy look of the almost identical Ivory version. But for any musician setting up their first studio, or just wanting something to improve the quality of home recordings, the 2Fat is fantastic value, very easy to use, and sounds truly full-fat. Mmmm. Now, where's the FatLady? ■

PROS

Great value, especially the 2Fat with its lovely Fat EQ and idiot-proof presets; flexible; solid sound quality throughout.

CONS

You have seen these designs before.

Contact

TL AUDIO, UK:
Website: www.fat-man.co.uk