

The UBK Fatso

As there is currently no manual for the UBK Fatso, I felt the need to type out a few of my thoughts and tips on what is a decidedly different tool than the stock Fatso. Unlike Dave Derr, who was obsessed with getting all the compressors to react similarly to equivalent input levels, I essentially 'bent' the circuits to my liking in order to push the capabilities of the box to its limits, because that's (imo) where the fun and brilliance of the circuit lives. So with the classic Fatso you could step through presets and your levels and gain reduction would remain relatively constant. With the UBK Fatso, each preset is its own animal and needs to be explored on its own terms; some start off with a scream, others with a whisper. You have to be an active participant, because I wanted to encourage people to turn knobs, ignore meters, and see what happens when they experiment fearlessly.

Splat: This is by far the most unusual compressor of the bunch. It has a very distinct knee/ attack relationship which creates a wonderful 'pop' on the front of transient rich sources like drums, and the more you dig in the more that pop creates the 'splat' character. The medium release has a swimmy kinda motion which makes for a very vintage grab. There are two big things to be aware of with Splat:

1. To get it to behave the way it does, I had to create a bizarre gain structure inside the circuit. The effect of this is that it begins compressing when the input knob is very low, and it has a quiet output so you have to really juice the output knob to restore equal gain. So on other comps you might be at 6 and 4; on Splat don't be surprised if you end up at 2 and 9, or 10 and 1. If you put it on, for example, a drum buss, and you go into the red and beyond, it begins to do some kind of bizarre negative compression. Instead of blowing up, the room will start to disappear and drums get very 70's dry, but with an unmistakably modern degree of squeeze. I've never heard any other compressor behave this way. Don't be afraid to play with the full swing of the input knob to hear the range of sounds it creates.

2. Because this is now my go-to drum compressor, I wanted the Warmth to work in extremely subtle increments. Even at maximum, you will likely only get 2-4db of reduction at best unless the material is extremely bright. Essentially, each step is now like a 1/4db high shelf attenuator at 12k, as to super-fine-tune the top end of cymbals or vocals rather than coarsely crush them.

Smooth: This is as close to brick wall limiting as analog gets, the attack time is ~70 microseconds (!) and the release is ultra fast. It was designed for tracking, but it does have its uses at mix time too, so (as always) experiment. Because it's so fast it'll kill the transient on anything; sometimes that's what you want, sometimes it's not. Drums are usually a no-go thru this comp unless you go parallel, they just lose their life. Drum loops, on the other hand, can sound stunning when crushed this way.

Track with it on acoustics, vocals, strings, horns... find the sweet spot you like (for me it's 5-7db on the peaks) and you'd never know any compression happened, it's invisible. Because it was designed for tracking, I made the warmth circuit a little more sensitive, so if you want to get really tapey rather than transparent you have the option. Options are good.

In a mix, Smooth is an amazing compressor for really unruly signals, such as "out of control" hip hop or screamo vocals, or erratically strummed acoustics – when you want to just pin them down and not have them budge. All the comps do a great job of this, but Smooth generally does it with the least artifacts, and it pulls the sound forward rather than pushing it back. This also makes it perfect as one of two comps in series.

Be warned: on some sources, particularly those with long or modulated decays or heavy low end energy, the lightning response of this compressor can make it break up at extremes, because it's literally riding the waveform. It won't sound good, and it won't be subtle. If it happens, just back off a little.

Glue: This is an incredible bass compressor, and depending on your mix style it does brilliant things on the 2buss. In the mix, it can level the craziest bass parts while retaining a ton of transient punch on the tip of each note. On acoustics and piano, it has a very natural action, neither transparent like Smooth, nor soupy like Splat; it's right up the middle. On drums, it has a hardness, a stiffness, kinda the quintessential Empirical Labs sound. As always, you can't make it sound bad, so keep turning the knob past what you think is wise and see what happens.

Splat/Spank Combo, code named 'Squish': Lighting up both the Splat and Spank presets simultaneously results in an absolute gem of a compressor. On drum buss, it has a huge low end that lets the kick really smack through, while clamping down super firmly on the snare in an extremely soft, extremely fat, old school way. Magic happens somewhere between the 10-15db mark on reduction. I haven't explored it as fully as the others (only so many hours in a day), but I encourage you to give it as much of a chance as the comps that have dedicated names, because it is every bit as cool, unique, and useful.

Feedback is coming in from quite a lot of users that all three presets active (Splat/Glue/Spank), is incredible for modern pop or R&B style vocals, where you want them pushed forward with zero movement with a sort of ethereal, airy quality. People are laying in anywhere from 7 to 20db and liking it. Still other users are reporting extreme goodness with the Glue/Spank combo, although no one's telling me exactly what they're doing with it! Consarn the big names and their secret ways.

That's all I can think of for now, enjoy!

(Thanks to our friend and customer Tak for providing a preliminary manual. UBK-scribed owner's manual coming soon!)