

SSL XLogic Super Analogue Channel

Nineteen-inch rackmount units with the Begbroke brand on them have been available for some time but it is only with the release of the XLogic range that the manufacturer has made a concerted push with the idea. **GEORGE SHILLING** says that it makes a lot of sense.



SSL DESKS OF THE 1980S were held in high regard for their revolutionary mixing and recall computer system, and their particularly good design layout. However, apart from the channel and mix bus compressors, it wasn't often (until the introduction of the 9000 J-Series desks) that their sound quality was praised when compared to competing large-format analogue consoles. The J of the mid-1990s changed that — it sounded fantastic — and the 9000 has been updated with a new computer and further enhanced 'Super Analogue' sonics in the shape of the XL K-Series. SSL has finally got round to packaging offshoots of the desk technology into individual outboard units.

The XLogic Channel is the flagship of the range, including most sections of an XL channel strip (apart from routing and sends) re-engineered to fit into a 1U box. However, there are notable differences in features, enhancing the usefulness of this recording channel. Unlike, say, some Focusrite channels, the rear panel is somewhat vacant. There are simply four connectors: XLRs for Input A and Output, a Key In XLR, and a 'Dyn Link' jack for slaving the dynamics sections of multiple units. However, there is a peculiar looking, enormously protruding heatsink, making this fairly deep case very deep. Although potentially vulnerable, it's preferable to a possibly noisy fan. A blanking panel suggests a future digital board (the other clue is an A-DC Lock LED on the front).

The front panel comprises a neat array of colour-coded knobs and very small buttons, all with accompanying LEDs. These are the same type as found on the console, although the tiny legending can be hard to see when you're not looking directly down on it. Firstly, there is a combi XLR and jack socket, the XLR designated as Input B, and the jack for instrument input. Unlike the desk, there are no separate Line and Mic inputs — convenient, but you need to be careful with the phantom power switch.

The Gain is stepped in 6dB intervals from 6dB to 72dB. An 18dB pad allows you to set the gain at 18dB for unity Line gain, with a Hi-Z button increasing the input impedance appropriately. Default input is A on the rear, with B or Instrument selected by buttons. The input section also includes the aforementioned 48V phantom and a Phase switch. The mic preamp sounds very natural, with plenty of headroom, no exaggeration or colouration, just rich, clear bottom end, with no fuzziness, and sweet and extended high frequencies, just like the preamps found on the console.

The next section along is Dynamics, although oddly, this is not the default position in the signal path. Beside the In button is a Pre EQ button, along with switches for Key In and Link, relating to the respective rear panel connections. The Compressor features a Peak-sensing mode for hard-knee operation. There are variable Threshold and Ratio and Release knobs, and a Fast Attack button.

It's not a Fairchild, but makes a pretty good general purpose compressor, with a wonderful squashiness for drums and, well, anything. I love the auto gain make-up feature, and those five familiar yellow and red LEDs showing the degree of 'squash'. The Gate section has knobs for Range, Threshold, Hold and Release, with a Fast Attack button and a button to switch it to Expander mode, which makes a great noise reducer setting. Range is only 40dB, but it works well, although the Fast Attack mode can tend to click with drum sounds.

Next are High and Low filters and these each have their own individual In button. The Input button places them at the earliest point in the signal chain (they are normally after the EQ, despite their front panel position) and Dyn S/C routes them to the dynamics side-chain.

The 4-band EQ includes parametric mid-bands with shelving bands top and bottom, each with an associated bell-curve switch. Between the In button and (another) Dyn SC button is a button marked 'E'. This effectively gives you a choice between G-Series

and E-Series style EQ. The E setting removes the 'undershoot/overshoot' effect at the turnover frequency of the high and low shelves and provides constant Q for the HMF and LMF bands, thought to be more useful for drums as you get a relatively high Q at low gain settings. In practice, the difference can be subtle, but it is nevertheless a useful option on this very powerful and bold EQ. The Low band has a gain range of +/-16.5dB, while the other three bands have a plentiful +/-20dB.

An Output Gain knob has a +/-20dB range and a centre detente — this is effectively your fader, although it can be a nuisance that it doesn't go all the way off. The LED meter, which can be switched to show input or output, is 7-segment with an extremely slow recovery.

The XLogic channel (UK£2250 + VAT) sounds as great as the XL desk strip, and behaves predictably. A larger 2U device could have made it look sexier, and would at least allow for a front panel power switch (it's on the rear), better metering and larger, more readable buttons and legending. But it looks like an SSL channel, and as an SSL fan since 1985, I thoroughly recommend it! ■

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PROS

Terrific SSL sound quality; familiar controls to SSL users; two EQ types.

CONS

Small legending; slightly illogical panel layout; danger of sending 48v to Line equipment.

EXTRAS

There are other products in SSL's new outboard range. The XLogic G Series Compressor employs G

Series centre compressor design elements in a SuperAnalogue design topology.

The XLogic Mic Amp provides four XL 9000 K Series SuperPre microphone preamplifiers in a 1U with optional remote control.

The XLogic Multichannel Compressor is 6-channel compressor that employs 'classic' SSL centre compressor design elements in a SuperAnalogue design topology. It is optimised for surround.

