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Danish manufacturer Lydkraft has entered the "all in one" recording channel race, with its Tube-Tech MEC 1A (\$3,495), combining the MP1A microphone preamp with the CL1B compressor and an equalizer similar to the EQ1A.



The back panel has a balanced XLR microphone connector; the front panel has an unbalanced 1/4-inch input, which also acts as a DI. The mic input transformer is followed by a +10dB step-up and two dual-triode tube stages. Gain is adjusted via two detented pots: A Coarse control switches among 10dB steps (20 to 60 dB) and a separate Fine gain adjustment knob in 1dB steps (1 to 10 dB). I like this feature, as provides accurate resettability. Other controls include 48V phantom and phase reverse switches, a -20dB pad and a 20/40 Hz switchable -12 dB/octave highpass filter. The MEC 1A really warmed up the sound of a shrill female vocalist using only the preamp section, without the equalizer or the compressor sections switched in.

A single XLR input accepts line and mic levels. The manual states the preamp stage can accept up to +6 dBu at 40 Hz without engaging the -20dB pad. With the pad switched in, the number would go to +26dBu. Still, I'd prefer a separate XLR jack with a line level input switch. If you install the unit in your outboard rack, there might be some confusion in the patchbay regarding the input patch point-is it a mic input or a line input? As a hot-level test, I plugged in a line-level signal from the 24-bit Pro Tools system. Even with the compressor switched in, I had to turn down the output level nearly to Off and I didn't care for the sound coming out of the unit. For these reasons, I am disinclined to use the MEC 1A for line level processing. However, -10dBV semi-pro input line levels from an 8-track Portastudio worked fine. And heated-up input levels can result in as much distortion anyone could want-I liked the bottom end distortion I got by cranking up the low frequency EQ along with the input gain. But in the real world, I would probably look to a less expensive unit for such treatments, rather than tie up the more multipurpose MEC 1A.

The high-impedance input is perfect for direct injecting guitars, bass or synths as there is no loading effect on those instruments. Plug into the front panel DI and the XLR input automatically deactivates. The DI input signal inserts right after the input transformer, before the first 12AX7 tube, and the gain range is +10dB to +60dB. Direct bass guitar is a natural here but the tube sound was great on R&B guitars and synth bass tracks.

Designed around a dual tube op-amp, the EQ is a 3-band type with LF/HF shelving and a mid section with 12 switchable frequencies and sweepable Q. LF shelving choices are 20/30/50/70/100/160 Hz, with 15 dB boost cut. The HF shelving offers  $\pm 15$ dB at 4, 6, 8, 12, 18 and a breezy 26 kHz. Mid frequencies overlap the high and low shelves and are: 40/60/80/130/250/500 Hz and then 1/1.6/2.5/4.7/10 kHz. I found the EQ's ability to do intensive surgery necessary for reducing a nasty mid-range peak from a singer's voice. The high frequency shelf is very open, airy and high-fidelity sounding. I liked this for adding "tizz and fizz" to background vocal parts. The EQ section can be toggled in or out of the signal path. All the unit's In/Out switches use a small toggle that you throw down for "in circuit"... Hey, Vikings, that's backwards here in America!

The compression section works like my old favorite, the Tube-Tech CL1B. A Fixed/Manual switch, when in Fixed position, locks the attack time to 1 ms and the release time to 50 ms. In the Manual position, the attack time control adjusts from 1 to 100 ms and the release time control goes from .07 to 2.5 seconds. The Ratio knob sets compression ratios from 1.5:1 to 10:1 while the Threshold control knob ranges from Off to -20dB. Make-up gain is adjusted with the Output control from Off to +10dB, just like on the CL1B. Here, Tube-Tech should have also used detented pots so that exact threshold and output levels could be reset later.

A smart idea is the EQ-COMP switch that uses a sealed relay to switch the equalizer either before or after the compressor. You'll get a different compression action when the compressor is first in the chain. The link 1/link 2 switch allows linking several compressors, with the ability to determine which is the master or slave. Compressor action is monitored on a way-too-small, unlighted VU meter with a toggle switch to select output level or gain reduction display. However, if you like the CL1B, then you'll like this section a lot: I got smooth and reliable results in all situations where I used a compressor.

The unit includes a brief instruction manual and a signed test report of each individual unit's exact performance. Frequency response for my review unit was -0.1 dB @ 10 Hz and only -3dB down at 100 kHz. THD at 40 Hz was 0.075% @ 0 dBm and 0.14% @ 10 dBm, with 1% THD at the maximum output of +27.5dBm. Unweighted (20 to 22k Hz) noise was measured at both a gain of +20 dB (84.5 dBU) and +60dB (-64 dBU).

The MEC 1A is painted in Tube-Tech's signature Royal blue enamel and is outfitted with vintage-looking guitar knobs and a brilliant red Fender amp-like incandescent pilot light. Housed in a steel chassis, the internal construction leaves nothing to be desired. The seven tubes are in tight sockets mounted on a thick, double-sided PC boards powered by a fully regulated solid state power supply with toroidal power transformer. The build quality along with high-quality switches, pots, transformers and components add up to a worthwhile tool for studio or rugged road work.

Tube-Tech, distributed in the U.S. by T.C. Electronic: 790-H Hampshire Rd., Westlake Village,

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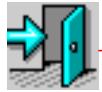


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