

## We get reacquainted with some of Pro Tools' stock plug-ins.

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If you install all the plug-ins which come with Pro Tools you'll be greeted with a generous array of processing options — tools that are often overshadowed by the allure of third-party alternatives. Yet, hidden among these are some real gems that can be just as effective, whether you're new to the DAW or a seasoned professional. In this article, we'll explore some of these overlooked plug-ins and share practical tips.

The exact set of plug-ins you have access to depends on which Pro Tools tier you're using — whether it's Intro, Artist, Studio, or Ultimate. Some premium Avid plug-ins require you to be 'on plan' with a subscription or support plan, but even without it, the stock plug-in library is substantial.

There are also some third-party plug-ins that come as part of Avid's Inner Circle scheme, which adds value over time for on-plan customers. But the total available to a new user is significantly boosted by legacy plug-ins, some of which have been around a really long time. Although they are 'legacy', Avid ensure that they're kept up to date so that users can open older sessions without issues. You might be surprised at how well these older plug-ins still hold up. Also, nearly all Avid plug-ins are available in AAX DSP versions — an increasingly rare feature.

If you haven't checked out the stock plug-ins as thoroughly as you might have, or if you've never even installed



The venerable EQ III has a neat feature whereby you can temporarily turn any band into a band-pass filter, allowing you to home in on your desired frequency.

all of them, there's probably a reason for that. Maybe you have a subscription with a third-party plug-in brand that already provides you with more plug-ins you can shake a stick at? Whatever the reason, let's get into some specific examples which might encourage you to look again at these plug-ins. Switch on the preference to display plug-ins by manufacturer as well as by type, and have a browse under 'Avid' to see what's already installed.

### EQ & Compression

I have to mention the stock EQ III 7-Band. There are third-party alternatives that offer more features and flexibility, but as a utility equaliser, EQ III is a solid choice. If you don't yet know about the band-pass feature in EQ III, try holding Control+Shift on a Mac or Start+Shift on Windows and grabbing a control point on the curve or

and then sweeping it. If you're cutting and you want to double-check you've got the right frequency, Shift-clicking the control point will invert the gain to a boost (or *vice versa*). Get these under your fingers and you'll really get the value of EQ III.

Moving onto compressors, the 1176 is one of the best known, and is of course much imitated. BF76 holds its own against premium offerings, in spite of the ancient UI with its less than smooth meter. Dialling in some moderate compression on a drum room mic, I was able to get a sound which, while not identical, was very close to a premium alternative. There were differences, but in a blind test I'm not sure I'd have chosen the premium plug-in as better. Under extreme settings the BF76 was nastier (in a good way), and given that aggressive sounds are often the intention when breaking out an 1176, it might be your preferred choice. To test it out set up your favourite 1176 emulation against BF76, set up one in slot A-E and the other in slot F-J, match by ear and A/B between them using Shift+2/3.

### Going Gritty

I'm not alone in really rating the Lo-Fi plug-in. The secret as far as I'm concerned is to ignore all the controls apart from Distortion, and only use tiny amounts of that. Dial in some Distortion on a DI bass guitar. Use a setting under 1 and follow it with a Trim plug-in to match the apparent

the frequency knob. This gives a momentary band-pass behaviour, allowing you to quickly find the offending frequency without resorting to setting up a narrow boost

BF76 might be old, but it still holds its own against modern third-party 1176 emulations.



levels. You'll hear a nice saturation effect that works really well on transient-rich material like drums if you take care not to go too far; it can really warm up a bass guitar, too. If I'm looking to put some subtle fur onto a sound rather than introducing a more audible 'trash', I'll sometimes use the stock SansAmp PSA-1.

## Pitch II

A great way to thicken or widen sounds is to use a detune effect, much like one would when detuning oscillators against each other in an analogue synth. Rather than using modulated delays to achieve this effect, try a static pitch-shift of a few cents in each channel of a stereo or a mono-to-stereo Pitch II plug-in.

Instantiate a mono-to-stereo Pitch II on a mono guitar track and tune down by up to five cents on one side and up by a few cents on the other. Mix to taste using the Mix sliders for some thickening and width. The beating caused by the detuning will change its speed depending on the settings, and if you want to try creating a more complex effect, stack multiple Pitch II plug-ins, with the Mix controls adjusted to blend the effect.

## Reverb & Delay

Don't write off the humble D-Verb. It's been used on more big-selling records than most of us realise. However, you do need to be aware of something important about it: the way it modulates pitch.

Set up a D-Verb as an insert on a simple sustaining part played on a pitched

instrument — a piano is ideal. Or, if you prefer, just set up a Signal Generator playing a tone (something not too piercing is recommended!). I used a square wave playing at 100Hz. Now listen to how the Hall algorithm affects the pitch: it modulates up and down in a clearly cyclical way like a slow vibrato. Now listen to Church. It's a much wider modulation. Next listen to Plate... you'll hear it's now modulating in this rather obvious and rather out-of-tune way. Keep this in mind when choosing which algorithm to use with pitched sources.

While the Avid Mod Delay is a flexible delay plug-in, if you're looking for something a little more characterful, don't forget the Tape Echo and BBD Delay plug-ins. These feature the distinctive bottom panel of dark grey buttons and knobs, which reveal their roots in the plug-ins originally developed for the Eleven Rack guitar interface. These plug-ins all respond to MIDI control in a way most AAX audio plug-ins do not, and so can be controlled from a standard MIDI controller.

If you don't have a dedicated control surface and want to play your delays in real time for dubby delay throws that would be difficult to perform using a mouse, instantiate the Tape Delay on an aux, create a MIDI track, assign the output to the plug-in and use MIDI Learn to assign controls to parameters by right-clicking the parameter and moving the encoder.

## AIR Stereo Width

While I don't use most of the audio plug-ins in the AIR Effects Bundle, there is an exception. AIR Stereo Width can be used as a workaround for a feature that otherwise is missing from Pro Tools: the ability to quickly mono check stereo material.

To do this, instantiate a Stereo Width plug-in on a stereo track. Use the first mode, Adjust, and set the Width all the way counterclockwise to 0 percent. Now with the plug-in active you are summing to



Unlike most AAX plug-ins, Tape Delay can be controlled using MIDI — great for dub delay throws!

mono. To toggle to stereo just bypass it. This feels the wrong way round to me but it's easy enough to control without having to open the plug-in UI. Just remember to Command-click the plug-in to toggle its bypass state. Blue for bypassed equals stereo.

If you don't have all the stock plug-ins installed, then it's worth knowing that since Pro Tools 2024.3 you no longer need to restart Pro Tools to use newly installed plug-ins. For all plug-ins other than ARA ones, Pro Tools should find them while it is running. My experience is that some third-party plug-ins don't do this, but if you want to try any of the tips listed here and don't have the necessary plug-ins installed, head over to your Avid account and download them. You can try them even if you have Pro Tools open right now.

So why not dive back into your Pro Tools plug-in library? Whether you're a newcomer or a seasoned user, there's plenty to explore in the stock plug-ins. You might discover that the tools you already have are more powerful than you think. **///**



D-Verb can be very effective, but it does apply varying degrees of pitch modulation depending on which algorithm you've selected.



By dialling the Width right down, the AIR Stereo Width plug-in can be used as a simple mono-sum button.