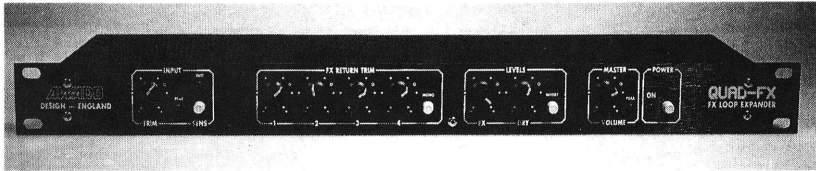


Quick Mixes



Award Quark - FX

AWARD QUAD-FX effects loop expander

review by Ian Masterson

"The multi-role magic box every musician will need... The professional way to hook up effects... Create your ultimate effects rack." If the brochure is anything to go by, the Award Quad-FX loop expander is the answer to all our prayers. Sweeping down from the skies in a golden cloud, this 1U black rack-mounting box promises to revolutionise your effects rack, save the British economy and bring everlasting peace and unity to the world.

Well, maybe not.

But the Quad FX is a deceptively clever piece of design, engineering and downright common sense. Most studio users have at some stage been in the situation where a multitude of effects processors have had to be connected to a mixing desk with only one effects send/return loop. Failing that, most people have also been in the situation of needing an extra couple of controllable inputs, be it for a 24-channel desk, basic four-track recorder, power amp or hi-fi monitoring system. The Quad-FX is designed to be an all-round solution to these problems and more.

The structure of this versatile box appears to be based on some very simple mixer technology. Let's take the typical studio example I hinted at above: your studio has four effects units, all of which you want to use in a mix. However, your mixing desk only has one auxiliary send free. Enter the Quad-FX, stage left. The unit takes a mono input from the auxiliary send on the desk; it

then splits this into four individual FX sends to connect to the inputs on your processors. No problem so far.

The stereo outputs (or returns) from the four processors are then connected back into the Quad, which offers an independent level control for each return. Get the picture now? What we're really talking about here is four parallel, individually controllable auxiliary busses from a single mixing-desk send.

Finally, the combined signal is mixed with the level of original dry signal from the desk (via another set of knobs) before being returned to the mixer. Your desk gets four extra busses, you get to use all of your effects in any combination you desire, and everyone is happy.

When you've finished employing the Quad in this role, you could go on to try out all sorts of other useful applications – a stereo mixer for your keyboards, perhaps. The unit is also ideal for use in a guitarist's rack, offering access to all those noisy, humming effects boxes without having to connect them in serial formations – and thereby slashing the noise level that such a permutation normally creates.

Knob-wise, the front panel hardly needs any explanation, being incredibly simple. But where would a *Home & Studio* review be without a guided tour of the features? So form an orderly line – in pairs, please – and we'll start at the left-hand side.

The input level is the first thing to be regulated, with a switch for line or 'instrument' levels, complementing the Trim rotary. The usual red 'Peak' LED warns of possible signal clipping, while a green comrade informs you if

the input is set at 'Instrument' level. And...well, that's about as complicated as the front panel gets.

Four rotaries are provided to control the individual levels of the returning signals from the actual processors; these are swiftly followed by yet more knobs to regulate the overall mix of the processed sound against the original dry sound. You also have the choice of summing the effects mix to mono, using an appropriately-titled switch. A master level control, 'peak' LED and power switch complete our whistle-stop front-panel trip.

The back panel offers a similar dearth of features: 17 quarter-inch jacks and a power socket, to be precise. Again, the Quad doesn't need much of a manual to explain these: one input, four effects sends, four stereo returns, a master stereo output and an 'effects only' mix output. The power supply is of the external box-and-two-leads variety – I'd like to point out at this stage that the lead from the transformer to the socket on the back of the Quad is far too short: if you were to mount this in a tall rack, the transformer would dangle alarmingly from a height. An extra two feet of cable would be welcome.

The Quad-FX is one of those devices which, once connected, you work with almost unconsciously. It is quite possibly the most useful extension you could think of for your desk.

In terms of sonic performance, I put it through the usual tests involving a raw CD/DAT signal, levels from one or two desks and several effects units, only to discover that it is extremely quiet – I'd have no qualms about

feeding the lowest of levels through it.

Physically, although this box ain't going to win any prizes for its stylish looks, it is solidly and reassuringly well-built. I can definitely see one being chosen for my dream rack – not, for once, because of glamorous facilities or flashing lights, but through sheer usefulness. It's just too handy not to have around. ■

More from: Award, PO Box 3, Basingstoke, RG24 9QA Tel: 0256 477222 Fax: 0256 817687

Quad-FX Stereo Effects Loop Expander

As far as we know, Quad-FX was the only mixer ever designed as a stereo effects loop expander. It replicated an amplifier's single 'mono send' signal into four 'mono sends' making it able to drive up to four rack mounted stereo effects processors connected in parallel. This maintained a stereo signal path. Each FX 'stereo return' had its own level control, with the whole group of four 'stereo returns' having a master level control too.

At the same time, it created a dry mono signal which could be mixed with the 'stereo wet' signals - an overall level control was also provided.

Control of the individual processor's sounds was done by one of the many MIDI floor controllers available.

They were £199.00 when new.