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Professional Audio and Music Production

DigiDesign Reel Tape Saturation Plug-In

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FIELD TEST

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Digidesign's Reel Tape™ Saturation (RTS) plug-in comes separate (\$295) or as part of the Reel Tape Suite (\$495). The suite includes an analog tape delay plug-in called Reel Tape™ Delay and Reel Tape™ Flanger, an emulation of old-style, two-machine analog tape flanging. These TDM, RTAS or Audio



Suite plugs are offered in mono or stereo versions, and handle up to 192kHz sample rates.

Reel Tape plugs are designed to re-create that analog *je ne sais quoi*--that elusive and hard to describe character of analog electronics and tape recorders. Analog tape's frequency response, noise, distortion and saturation are all modeled but without any detrimental delay, wow or flutter. Reel Tape Saturation, like the other plugs, starts with four controls that define the signal path of the "virtual" analog recorder.

Tape saturation is controlled by the **Drive** knob (+/-12 dB); **Output** (also +/-12 dB) is the deck's playback level--useful for reducing the level when Drive is maxed; **Tape Machine** gives you a choice between the sound of an American-made 3M M79 deck, Swiss Studer A800 multitrack and low-fi tape echo machines like a Maestro Echoplex or a WEM Copy Cat. Lastly, a subtler parameter called **Tape Formula** switches tape stock between the old-school Ampex 456 Grand Master, which saturates at lower Drive levels, and the higher-output, modern Quantegy GP9.

The **Speed** switch provides the effect of 7.5/15/30 ips tape speeds. Each position mimics the original machine speeds well--as well as I can remember. The **Noise** knob (Off to -24 dB) adds tape hiss and grunge, depending on the speed, tape formula, machine and drive settings. Noise is produced only during playback. The **Bias** (+/-6dB) control simulates over or under-biased tape for duller or brighter-sounding recordings with differing distortion characteristics. This effect works instantly the same as tape but unlike 'back in the day', when you couldn't tell until playback.

I inserted RTS on electric guitars, bass, vocals and keyboard tracks. This is strictly an insert plug-in with only 4 ms of latency. Electric guitars take on a thick, almost syrupy character, as if recorded at a superhot (analog) level. For bass guitar, I liked 15 ips because the low end is fatter--just like real tape. As I would expect, the 7.5 ips speed had more noise and rounded-off high frequencies. It was better for supergrungy vocal effects. Wurlitzer electric pianos get very warm and fuzzy with much more harmonic distortion and sustain.

RTS is well used in the send path to reverb or delay effects. It rounds off sibilance and compresses in an analog sort of way that makes for a smoother result--you'll want more.

Il have several other 'analog warmer' plugs but I prefer RTS over them because it can be very non-subtle--you can go overboard and dial it back later. I related to all the adjustable parameters--they make sense and change the sound exactly like in the real world of analog recording. Both Reel Tape Suite and Reel Tape Saturation are downloadable from the DigiStore.

Digidesign, 800-333-2137, www.digidesign.com

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