



Ted Fletcher Audio Gear P38

The reign of the much-acclaimed P8 ends with the release of the new P38. George Shilling watches the coronation.

KEY FEATURES

- Soft Clip function
- Stereo Width control
- Transient Release control
- Switchable input/output metering
- 4-position Model switch
- Balance control
- Ultra Gain switch

P38

Manufacturer **Ted Fletcher Audio Gear**

Price **£1,099**

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The P38 stereo compressor is the latest in a long line of designs by Ted Fletcher that officially started with the Joemeek SC2 in 1993.

Following a number of variations on the Joemeek theme, Ted Fletcher released the very versatile, bright-red P8 'Edward' compressor. The P38 takes the best qualities of that unit, and refines operation still further.

Fletcher's designs are well-known for their use of optical compression techniques, and the P38 follows that trend. But rather than opting to use somewhat lethargic photo-electric cells, Fletcher employs LEDs in his circuits, which achieve much faster compression characteristics.

The P38 has a shallow case and is rather lighter than rival units. The rack handles are gone; it is now fronted with tall Focusrite Red-style knobs, and a pair of wonderfully large and clear, illuminated VU meters. Around the back are the usual IEC mains input socket and voltage selector. Analogue audio connections are provided on both XLR and jack sockets, all at

+4dB professional level. The input sockets lack latching clips, but work well enough, while the provision of separate jacks rather than combo sockets is a bonus.

On the front is a lightly detented, large input gain knob with a clearly marked scale, so recalling settings is easy. A +14dB boost switch is also provided to increase compression to consumer audio levels. The metering arrangement is slightly unconventional, displaying either the left and right output levels (after the output gain knob) or, by pressing the Meter button, the mono level before the output knob on the left meter, with gain reduction displayed on the right. If you're using the P38 in a fixed stereo mode, compression will always be similar on both sides of the buss, so this arrangement does make sense, but it is a little disconcerting at first.

Take it to the limit

Although the P38 is an optical compressor offering conventional Attack, Release, Threshold and Ratio controls, it also offers four distinct operational modes, each with different compression characteristics. Ratio is easy to set, going from 1.2:1 right up past 20:1 to Limit, with 3:1 at 12 o'clock. Turning the Threshold knob clockwise actually lowers the threshold, which is perhaps counter-intuitive. Modes are simply numbered 1-4 on the front panel, but the manual provides more of a clue. These

respectively comprise VCA, 1176, LA-2A and Green Box settings. Working backwards, the latter is, of course, a copy of the Joemeek SC2. (The Joemeek and earlier TFPro models had a Slope knob with several fixed settings rather than the variable Ratio provided here, so this is more flexible.) This mode offers powerful compression without dulling or colouring the tone.

The LA-2A mode lacks some of the hugeness and expression of the much more expensive valve-based original, but emulates its attack and release characteristics fairly well. Unlike the P38, however, the LA-2A had no variable attack and release (and only two different ratios), but offered a two-stage release, with short peaks releasing quickly and longer peaks releasing slowly. The P38 copies this characteristic very well, with the advantage of having variable times (the secondary release can go even longer than the indicated three seconds).

Squeeze me

The 1176 is a much more aggressive-sounding compressor, and although the P38 lacks some of its essential components, a bit of clever engineering enables it to emulate much of the excitement and juiciness of an 1176. VCA mode operates as a straightforward compressor. Based on more neutral modern designs, attack is fast and linear, and release is a simple linear capacitor discharge. It works well on some program material, and any pumping can be reduced with the Transient Release function. This unique feature is not fully explained in the somewhat scatty manual, but it seems to smooth out the reaction to short peaks. This can have the effect of reducing the excitement of the music, but enables more compression to take place before things get out of hand.