

# Future Music Jon Musgrave

Portico™ 5042 July 2007

Over the years various designers have put their name to classic pro audio. From the component-led design of a Pultec EQ to the creative beauty of a Moog synthesizer, you instantly know and trust the people behind the gear. In pro audio circles, no name is more renowned than Rupert Neve's. Over the years he's not only been responsible for some of the best audio designs ever created, he's also built up his fair share of companies, including Neve Audio, Focusrite and t now Rupert Neve Designs (RND). At 80 years of age you'd have thought a happy retirement would be uppermost in his mind, but as the latest Portico modules indicate, it's clearly not. This modular range of units (along with his new analogue mixing desk) are the fruits of his latest factory in Texas. Modular As you can see, the Portico units are small half-rack modules. There are seven units in the range including mic pres, EQs, compressors, a tape emulation line driver and a stereo field editor. The range covers a lot of ground in various different ways, with the 'true tape' line driver probably the most innovatory product. Thanks to Sonic, the UK distributor, we have three of them to try out – the 5032 single channel mic pre/EQ, the 5042 twin channel 'true tape' line driver and the 5043 twin channel compressor. Before looking at the individual units, it's worth considering the overall design concept Neve has applied here. First up, like the great designs from the '70s, these are discrete transistor-based circuits (so no valves), using singlesided (or Class A) amplifier designs. All units use new custom-designed input and output transformers and have balanced ins and outs on XLRs. This combined with the independent power supplies, and magnetically shielding steel enclosures means your Portico is about as isolated from ground loops, noise and interference as possible.

**The 5042**The 5042 feels a little like the odd one out in the Portico range. Designed to emulate the sound that recording to tape imparts (7.5IPS and 15IPS no less), it's a simple-looking two-channel unit with input level and 'saturation' controls. So how exactly does it go about this? Well, first up the sound associated with tape recording is a combination of many factors including the input/output amplification, the emphasis/deemphasis EQ circuits, the record and replay heads, and the tape itself. The 5042 incorporates all these elements minus the

tape, allowing you to drive the input heads in the way you would when driving tape. To keep things simple, the record and replay amplifiers are coupled so that driving the input reduces the replay level. And the tape speed options reflect the different emphasis/de-emphasis circuitry you'd get on a tape deck. So how does it sound? Quite frankly – brilliant! With tape emulation engaged, the input trim at zero and the saturation set to minimum you effectively have a unity gain situation. But because the signal isn't actually bypassed you're still getting the initial effect of the circuitry. It's at this stage that the differences between the tape speeds first become apparent. With the 7.5IPS setting, there's a filling out of the low mids slightly, with a taming effect on the high frequencies. At 15 IPS the effect on the low mids is less marked, but the real difference is there's a noticeable high frequency lift. The effect is like a subtle enhancer. As you further push the saturation control, the sonic differences become more marked, but it's only when the level meters hit the red that you might re-consider. And with amplifier coupling taking care of overall levels, you can concentrate on the sound. Overall the 15IPS option seems better for using on mixes. The slower tape speed is far more suited to taming and thickening things such as drum overheads. Either way both options are far more varied than you may at first think, and seriously addictive.