

# EDAX AUDIO LABS VTP-100

## No Transformers Allowed

by Cliff Goldmacher

While I love the convenience, flexibility, and accessibility digital tools provide, I've always been wary of any new technology that promises a "classic" sound. Like many of you, getting a vintage sound in my studio(s) has been all about integrating choice pieces of hardware into a digital environment—in particular, building a high quality front end to ensure that a good sound is going into my DAW. For preamps, I've always liked Manley Labs and Avalon, and those companies have set tough standards for other manufacturers to meet. But I'd heard good things about Edax Audio Labs' new VTP-100, so I decided to unplug my go-to gear and give it a try.

### OVERVIEW

Though aesthetics have very little to do with performance, the VTP-100 looks really sharp. But while I appreciate the brushed aluminum knobs and the old-school VU meter with the subtle red backlight, I was attracted to the VTP-100 because it's feature-rich. With mic, line, and DI inputs, a high pass filter, overload indicator, switchable 48V phantom power, peak hold, 20dB pad, phase-reversal switch, headphone amp out, and a Re-Amp Tube (Edax describes this as "a Hi-Z unbalanced output stage for driving musical amplifiers"), it's safe to say that Edax wanted to cover all the bases. Add the notched gain knob, and you can color me impressed. By regulating the input gain with discrete clicks (controlling the gain in 5dB steps), all fine-tuning is left to the output knob, making it easy to get a good signal level into my DAW.

However, I have one gripe about the VTP-100: Though I'm happy to make the necessary compromises for gear that doesn't come with a rack-mount apparatus, the fact that the VTP-100 doesn't come with pads for the bottom of the unit resulted in exposed screw heads that left deep, permanent scratches on my studio furniture—and studio furniture is not

Edax Audio Labs VTP-100.



cheap. On the other hand, even though rack ears don't come with the unit, they can be purchased separately for \$80 list (for either the mono or two-channel version).

### IN USE

Jimmy Dulin, one of my engineers, put the VTP-100 through its paces on acoustic guitar and vocals. His comments: "It felt great to run sound through it. It has the sound of a good tube pre, with maybe slightly less 'beef' to it due to the lack of a transformer. My first impression is that it would be a solid complement to a source that's a little dark or muddy." He also said "There's plenty of gain there, so it would probably be good for low-output mics like ribbons... it kind of felt like a tube version of an API."


With that kind of endorsement, I was anxious to hear it for myself. I started with a snare drum overdub. Like wearing running shoes with an Armani tux, it felt simultaneously weird and wonderful to plug a \$100 SM57 to a boutique pre. However, the VTP-100 added a presence and detail to the snare that the signal otherwise would have lacked.

I also had a pedal steel player run a line from his Line 6 POD into the VTP-100. I was glad to hear that the VTP-100 imparted a bit of genuine tube goodness between the POD and the input of my Pro Tools rig. The design's simplicity was apparent in how easy it was to get a good input level, then tweak the output level to keep a strong signal through the chain.

Finally, in a rather random series of overdubs, I was able to test the VTP-100 on accordion, harmonica, and

violin. In all three cases, I used a large diaphragm Shure KSM-44 running directly into the VTP-100. I really like the neutral tone of the KSM44 in general and running it through the Edax just brought an additional warmth and mellowness to these instruments that, in my experience, have the potential to cut a bit too much in the mix.

### CONCLUSIONS

While my needs for a tube pre are generally fairly simple (*i.e.*, provide a solid, clean front end for my DAW), the VTP-100 provides a wealth of useful options, not the least of which is its re-amping feature. Overall, the unit is extremely well thought-out and designed, and it can provide a great early link in your recording chain if you seek some good old-fashioned tube warmth. 

**PRODUCT TYPE:** Half-rack class A tube mic pre.

**TARGET MARKET:** Project to professional studio owners looking to add tube warmth to the front end of their recording chain or diversify their pre options.

**STRENGTHS:** Low noise, warm tones. Simple to use. Transformerless output design.

**LIMITATIONS:** Needs pads for the exposed screws on the bottom if you don't buy the optional-at-extra-cost rack ears.

**LIST PRICE:** \$960

**CONTACT:** [www.edaxaudio.com](http://www.edaxaudio.com)