

## Chameleon Labs 7802 Review by Warren Dent 05-15-09

OK the short review would be this: On vocals, a 4:1 ratio with drive around the 1:00 position, attack / release turned to the fastest position = so close to an LA2A you'll get sick of switching back and forth between the two (like me). So is there any more review needed than that? Sure, why not...it's got more features and controls! Also, on other sources it's not as LA-2A like.

The 7802 is a remarkable optical compressor, with a tube drive section that is utterly dial-in-able (and doesn't just turn into a stomp box grunge sound). It uses the 'Vactrol' brand optical cell for gain reduction, has 5 preset attack / release times (tied together, yet program dependent too) and the 12AX7 drive circuit acts not only as 'color' control (ie distortion) but when pushed is another gentle stage of dynamics control to my ears. The output transformers seem to be helping out with a pretty big sort of sound (although I admit I am wondering what another brand of output transformers might do).

I love the balance between somewhat tweakable and ease of use, very well thought out overall. It has that smooth opto control, it doesn't do lightning quick but it's quick enough for control over drums, bass and vocals which would be the main reach for this unit. The drive circuit is always in line, you can keep it pretty low so it's not overly noticeable but it's always there. Overall the 7802 does have a 'sound' to it, from the compression character (pumpy action is very obvious when dialed in) to the drive character (a nice tingly tube sound with a good range of push rather than clean or fuzz box). The range of compression and distortion character are very nice, there's plenty to reach for, and there's a lot of clean makeup gain after the drive circuit. The 7802 does darken things up a little bit overall. Drums are held in place nicely but expect pump to be fairly obvious (not a bad thing for rock and pop!), snares get that bit of splat (hit snare with the drive a bit harder). On drums I prefer the attack set slow at times (the LA2A does more of an average compression on things like the whole drum kit or room mic, the 7802 has a bit more obvious attack and release character in this position), but overall for that 'classic' sound the fastest setting gets it. Kick drum and drum kit I typically liked using the hi pass filter on the sidechain to keep low end from eating things up too bad.

Bass guitar tracks that need some fattening up and harmonic content, with pumpy control will benefit from the 7802 also. Solo guitar with long sustained notes can be dialed in nicely for some Spinal Tap "ah-h-h-h-h" sustain. At the time of this writing I have not used on 2 buss, I will reserve judgment for that when that day comes.

Conclusion: For tracking and mixing of individual sources the 7802 really can achieve ballpark LA2A style control with only a couple of differences: an LA2A retains a touch more top end when compressing...but also has about twice the self noise. The LA2A also has a bit more of that 'wooly' bottom end size to it. In general, I would go so far as to call this unit the "poor man's LA2A" for vocal use all day long. Not the same exactly, and more percussive sources widen the gap, it's but capable of getting close enough that the price tag is well justified on the 7802.