



fPre

Multi-Mode Preamplifier
Plugin

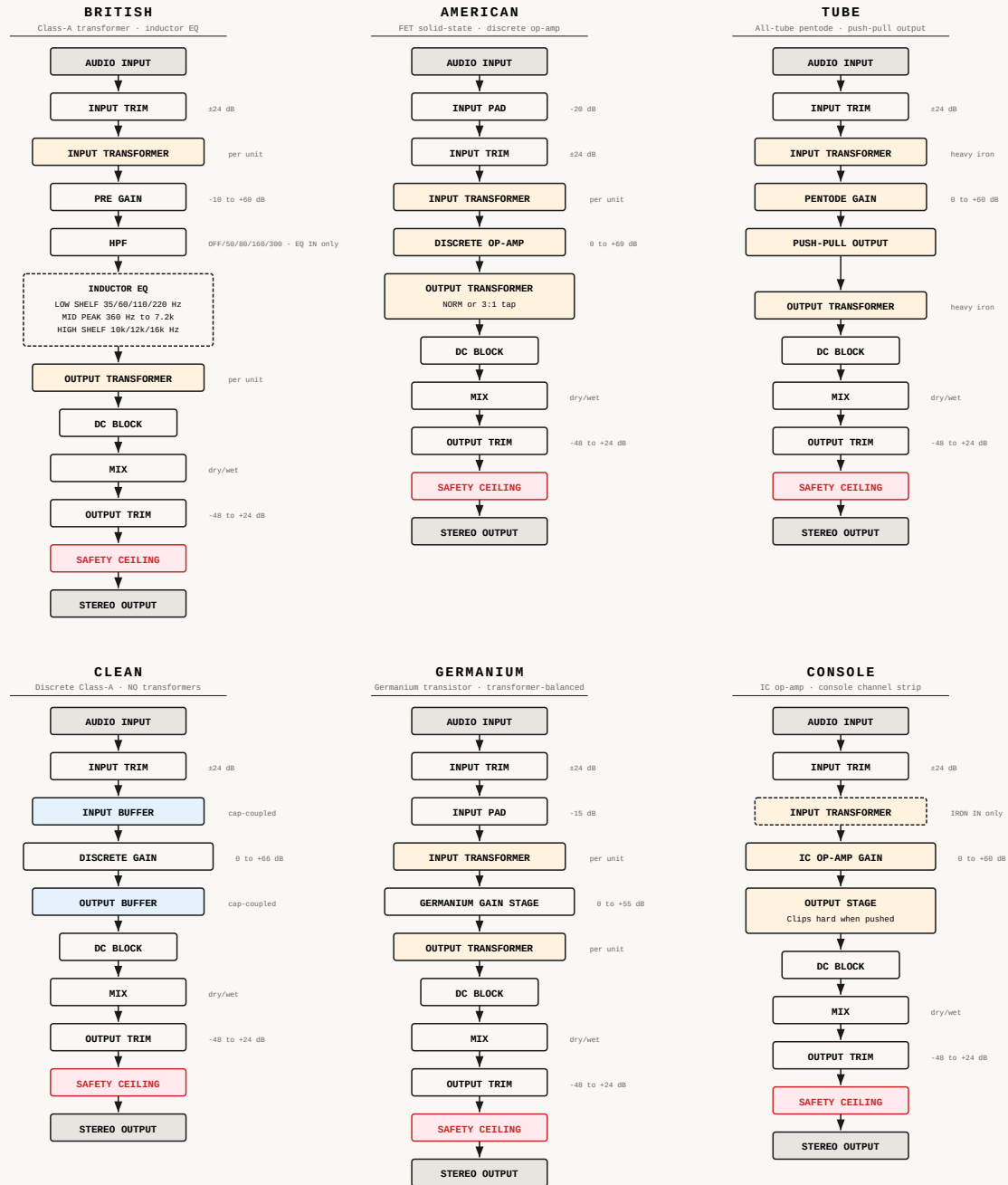
Product Manual

Build 1.0

by flakebelly
fboxaudio.com

fPre - SIGNAL FLOW

BRITISH · AMERICAN · TUBE · CLEAN · GERMANIUM · CONSOLE

**LEGEND**

- I/O point (audio in, stereo out)
- Standard stage
- Transformer / iron stage
- Buffered stage (no iron)
- Safety ceiling
- Switchable / optional stage

NOTES

1. Every mode shares the same outer path: input trim on the way in, then mix, output trim and a safety ceiling on the way out. Only the middle of the chain changes with the mode.
2. Each mode keeps its own independent settings. Switching mode never disturbs another mode's setup.
3. British is the only mode with an EQ. The EQ switch takes the high-pass filter in and out along with the three bands.
4. Bypass keeps both trims in circuit, so levels do not jump.
5. Mix blends against your input as it arrived, taken before the input trim.
6. Every instance has its own analogue character, set by its serial number.

What fBox Is

fBox is a complete analogue mixing ecosystem - individual plugins, a universal rack processor, and a full 32-channel mixing console with built-in tape machine - built around a single idea: every piece of hardware that ever left a factory floor had its own personality, and your plugins should too.

Most plugin companies model hardware. They pick one unit, capture it as accurately as they can, and sell that one model to everyone. Your copy is identical to mine. The compressor on your kick is the same compressor on your vocal. It has always worked this way - and it is the reason in-the-box mixes sound in the box.

fBox is built on the opposite principle. Every plugin instance carries a unique serial-seeded analogue character, generated the moment it is created. Load three fComps in one session and you have three different compressors, each with its own voice. That serial is fixed to the instance forever - it never resets, and it travels with the session.

The choice is yours. Open a fresh instance whenever you like and it is a different unit with its own voice - or find one you love and keep it. Save it, recall it, and mix through it for as long as you like: the same character, every time. Learn how it sounds and it becomes an instrument you know. And a unit you keep is yours alone - its serial exists on no one else's machine, the same way a piece of hardware you buy is one specific unit and no other. Bought once, owned permanently, no subscription.

This is not emulation. This is character at the instance level.

What fPre Is

fPre is a multi-mode mono/stereo preamplifier: six different preamps in one box, each with its own gain element and its own way of breaking up when you push it. **British** is thick and forward and carries a three-band inductor-style EQ. **American** is fast and punchy with a switchable output transformer tap. **Tube** is warm and creamy with heavy iron. **Clean** adds as little as possible. **Germanium** is soft and woolly and saturates earliest. **Console** is the channel amp of a mixing desk, with a transient snap of its own.

It is not six plugins sharing a front panel. Each mode is a complete signal path, and each keeps its own independent settings, so switching from British to Tube and back leaves everything exactly where you left it.

All six colour the signal at any gain setting, not only when you drive them hard. Set every control to its default and you will still hear the preamp: the input stage, the gain element and the output stage are always in circuit. Gain decides how hard you lean on them.

Every instance of fPre generates a unique serial number that defines its hardware character - the specific set of manufacturing tolerances that make this unit sound like this unit and no other. Two British instances set to the same gain produce subtly different warmth. A Germanium unit that starts breaking up on your machine might hold clean a touch longer on your collaborator's. No two instances sound exactly alike, just like no two real preamps do.

fPre works everywhere the rest of the fBox suite does. Use it in a DAW, as an insert in the fBox Console (the plugin or the dawless Console Standalone), or in a slot of the fBox Rack. Its unit and everything you set are saved with whichever session you are in - it sounds and behaves the same in all of them.

fPre registers as an effect. It accepts mono or stereo input and outputs stereo. Every on-screen control is automatable from your host.

Getting Started

1. Insert fPre on a track. 2. Pick a mode - British is the best all-rounder to start with. 3. Turn **Gain** up until you like what you hear. 4. Bring the level back with **Output**, or press **Gain Match**. 5. A/B against **Bypass**.

You will hear something before you touch Gain at all. The input stage, the gain element and the output stage colour the signal even at unity, and Gain decides how hard you lean on them.

New to preamps? A preamp is the first thing a microphone or instrument signal meets, and it is where quiet signals are made loud enough to work with. Every one leaves a fingerprint while it does it - a bit of weight from the transformers, a bit of thickening from the gain stage, a slight softening of the very top. Low gain settings are mostly clean with a little weight. High settings push the gain element into saturation, which thickens the sound, rounds the transients and adds harmonics. There is no wrong setting: turn it up until you like it, then set the output level to match.

Important: *Louder almost always sounds better, which makes it very easy to fool yourself. Match your levels before you decide whether a setting is an improvement. Gain Match gets you close in one click, and I/O Link keeps you level while you drive harder.*

Tip: *Set up a loop of something you know well, leave every control at default, and step through the six modes listening to nothing but the character. At default the differences are small but real. Then set Gain to about +30 dB in each mode in turn and they stop being subtle. Clean is your reference throughout - if you cannot tell whether a mode is helping, switch to Clean, match the level, and switch back.*

Interface

The window changes size to suit the mode you select. A resize button in the bottom-right corner offers three sizes: Small (75%), Medium (100%) and Large (150%). Double-click a knob to return it to its default; the two-position switches toggle on a single click.

Header

Control	What it does
Serial number	The unit's serial, shown at the far left. This is the identity of the analogue character you are hearing (see Analogue Character).
Unit	Opens the unit menu - roll a new unit, save or recall one, and pin a default (see Units and Patch Cards).
fPre title	Centre of the header.
Quality	Eco, Studio or Master (see Quality).
Mode	British, American, Tube, Clean, Germanium or Console. The panel changes to match.
Reset Engine	Clears any fault and resets the internal DSP. Controls are left as they are.
Help	Opens the built-in help window.
Fault	A red indicator that appears only if invalid audio is detected. Click Reset Engine to clear it.

Panel sections

Most modes are a single row of controls: the trims, Bypass, Gain, Mix, I/O Link and whatever switches that mode carries. British is two rows, because it carries the EQ section as well - HPF, Low, Mid, High and the EQ switch. A cluster of buttons - Gain Match, Reset, Save Patch Card and Load Patch Card - sits at the right-hand end of the control area (see Actions and Header Controls).

Meters

Input meters sit on the far left, Output meters on the far right, each as an L/R pair. Click a meter to switch it between Peak and RMS (see Meters).

Signal Flow

Understanding the order of stages helps explain why some control combinations interact the way they do. Earlier stages feed later ones, so a change up top changes how everything below it behaves.

#	Stage	Notes
1	Audio input	Mono or stereo accepted
2	Input conditioning	Pad and impedance, where the mode has them
3	Input trim	-24 to +24 dB
4	Input stage	Transformer or buffer, depending on the mode
5	Gain element	The mode's own amplifier, and its main character control
6	Mode character stages	Bloom, drift, snap and the rest, where the mode has them
7	EQ section	British only, and only when EQ is IN
8	Output stage	Transformer or buffer, depending on the mode
9	DC block	Removes any offset the non-linear stages introduced
10	Mix	Blends the processed signal against your untouched input
11	Bypass	Click-free crossfade; both trims stay in circuit
12	Noise floor	This unit's own, always present
13	Output trim	-48 to +24 dB
14	Safety ceiling	Always active
15	Stereo output	

Where the modes differ

Mode	Key elements
British	Transformer in and out, stepped gain, impedance switch, inductor-style EQ with HPF
American	Pad, transformer in and out, switchable output tap
Tube	Heavy iron both ends, low-level bloom, hot bias option
Clean	No transformers, buffered in and out, impedance switch
Germanium	Pad, transformer in and out, slow gain drift, warmth option
Console	Switchable input transformer, transient snap on the way out

Note: Pad sits ahead of Input Trim in American and behind it in Germanium. In both cases the pad is out of circuit when Bypass is engaged, so a bypassed signal is your input with the trims and the noise floor only.

Common Controls

All six modes share these controls. Everything else is specific to the mode and is covered in that mode's chapter.

Input

Range: -24 to +24 dB in 0.5 dB steps. **Default:** 0 dB. Level going into the preamp. It sets how hard the input stage and the gain element are hit, so it doubles as a drive control: raise it and you get more colour at the same Gain setting. Double-click to reset to 0 dB.

Gain

The gain element itself, and the main character control of every mode. The range differs per mode, from 0 to +55 dB in Germanium up to 0 to +69 dB in American. **Default:** 0 dB everywhere.

Bypass

Default: Off. Mutes the preamp character and passes your signal through. The Input and Output trims stay active, and so does the unit's own noise floor, so levels do not jump as you switch. For a completely untouched signal, use your host's own bypass.

Output

Range: -48 to +24 dB in 0.5 dB steps. **Default:** 0 dB. Final level, always active. The range runs much further down than up because high gain settings need a lot of taking back. Double-click to reset to 0 dB.

Mix

Range: 0 to 100%. **Default:** 100%. Dry/wet blend. At 100% you hear the preamp alone; at 0% you hear your untouched input. Everything in between is parallel colour, with the driven signal sitting underneath the dry one.

I/O Link

Links Input and Output inversely: turn the input up and the output comes down by the same amount, so the level stays roughly constant while you drive the preamp harder. The Output knob is disabled while the link is on.

Tip: *I/O Link is the fastest way to hear how much colour you actually want. Engage it, then sweep Input from bottom to top: the loudness stays put and all you hear is the character changing. That is a far more honest comparison than turning Gain up and being seduced by the extra level.*

Headroom

fPre keeps a safety ceiling on its output so a hard-driven setting cannot blow up your monitors. It can still get very loud inside that ceiling, and it is possible to exceed 0 dBFS: watch the output meter and use Output to manage your headroom.

The Six Modes

Mode	Character	Gain range	Reach for it when
British	Thick, forward, coloured. The only mode with an EQ.	-10 to +60 dB, 5 dB steps	You want the preamp to be audible
American	Fast, punchy, open, with a lot of headroom	0 to +69 dB	Attack matters and you want it to survive
Tube	Warm, creamy, thick, heavy iron	0 to +60 dB	The source needs weight and forgiveness
Clean	Transparent. Gain with nothing added	0 to +66 dB	The source is already right
Germanium	Soft, woolly, earliest saturation	0 to +55 dB	You want it to sound old
Console	Clean at rest, snaps when pushed	0 to +60 dB	You want cohesion across many tracks

Each mode keeps its own independent settings, so switching mode never disturbs another mode's setup. You can dial in a British vocal chain and a Germanium bass sound in the same instance and flip between them.

The gain ranges differ because the topologies differ. Germanium tops out lowest because germanium has the least headroom of the six, and American reaches highest because a solid-state front end can. The number is not a quality rating - it is how much amplification that kind of circuit offers before it runs out of room.

Note: *Because each mode keeps its own trims as well, switching mode recalls that mode's levels rather than carrying the current ones across. If the level jumps when you change mode, that is why - set the trims per mode, or press Gain Match after switching.*

British Mode

Thick, forward and coloured - the classic British desk sound, and the mode most people mean when they say a preamp has a sound. Great on vocals, drums, bass and guitars.

Controls

Gain

Fifteen stepped positions, **-10 to +60 dB** in 5 dB steps. **Default:** 0 dB. Low settings are relatively clean with the iron adding weight. From about +20 dB the gain element starts to compress and thicken. By +40 dB and beyond it is a colour effect in its own right rather than a way of making things louder.

Impedance

300 ohm or **1.2k ohm**. **Default:** 1.2k. This sets how hard the source loads the input transformer. 300 loads it harder: thicker, more saturated, with the low-end resonance sitting lower. 1.2k is cleaner and more open. The switch makes a bigger difference than people expect, and it is source-dependent rather than a better setting - try both on everything.

The EQ section

British carries a three-band inductor-style EQ with a high-pass filter, switched in and out with the EQ toggle. It starts OUT.

EQ

IN or **OUT**. **Default:** OUT. This switches the whole EQ section, high-pass included.

Important: With EQ set to OUT, the band controls and the HPF do nothing at all. If you are turning EQ knobs and hearing no change, this is why. The preamp colour is unaffected either way - the signal still runs through the transformers and the gain stage - so switching the EQ out costs you nothing but the EQ.

HPF

OFF, 50, 80, 160 or **300 Hz**. **Default:** OFF. A steep high-pass for clearing rumble, handling noise and proximity build-up before the EQ and output stages.

Low

Shelf. **Frequency:** 35, 60, 110 or 220 Hz (default 35). **Gain:** -16 to +16 dB (default 0). Boost for weight and warmth, cut to clear mud.

Mid

Peak. **Frequency:** 360 Hz, 700 Hz, 1.6k, 3.2k, 4.8k or 7.2k (default 360). **Gain:** -18 to +18 dB (default 0). The workhorse band: presence around 3.2k, honk and boxiness around 700, air and edge at 7.2k.

High

Shelf. **Frequency:** 10k, 12k or 16k (default 12k). **Gain:** -16 to +16 dB (default 0). Open the top up, or take the hardness off.

Character

The EQ behaves like an inductor design rather than a digital parametric, and that changes how you use it. The bands get tighter as you push them, so gentle settings are broad and musical while big moves are focused and aggressive. Boosts drift their centre slightly upward as they grow, and cuts sit a touch narrower than boosts. Push the low end hard and the section thickens on its own, which is where a lot of the character lives.

The gain element and both transformers colour the signal before the EQ ever gets involved, so the gain setting changes what you are equalising.

Tip: Set Gain first, EQ second - a 3 dB presence boost on a clean setting and the same boost at +40 dB are not the same move, because the second is lifting harmonics the preamp created. Big broad boosts are the point of this EQ, not a mistake: +8 dB on the low shelf is a normal setting here and reads as weight rather than as EQ. When a boost gets harsh, back the Gain off rather than cutting the band, because the harshness is usually saturation rather than frequency balance. HPF at 80 with a low shelf boost at 60 is the classic vocal move.

American Mode

Fast, punchy and open, with plenty of headroom. The one for drums, guitars, aggressive sources and anything where the attack is the point.

Controls

Gain

Range: 0 to +69 dB, continuous. **Default:** 0 dB. Clean and open at low settings with a lot of headroom in hand. As you push, it develops a hard, present kind of colour that stays fast rather than thickening the way British or Tube do.

Pad

OFF or **-20 dB**. **Default:** OFF. Drops the signal before the preamp. Use it when a hot source is overloading the input before you have got the Gain where you want it.

Transformer

NORM or **3:1**. **Default:** NORM. Selects how much of the output transformer winding the signal runs through. NORM is the standard balanced output with mild weight. 3:1 drives the iron substantially harder: much more low-end saturation, a more driven character, and slightly less headroom, all without touching your Gain setting. It is the mode's signature move.

Character

Clean and detailed, with a forward midrange. The other thing this preamp does is shift where its harmonics sit as the level rises: quiet material colours down in the low mids, and as you push it the colour climbs up the spectrum. It is why loud sources sound bright and forward through it while quiet ones sound solid rather than harsh. The transformer voicing is tighter and brighter than British - where British thickens, American sharpens.

Tip: On drums, get the Gain where you want the attack first, then hit the 3:1 tap for weight. It is a completely different sound from simply adding more gain. Pad ON with more Gain is not the same as Pad OFF with less, either: the pad sits ahead of the preamp, so padding and then driving harder gives you more transformer and gain-stage colour at the same output level. On bright, hot sources that is often exactly the trade you want.

Tube Mode

Warm, thick and creamy, with heavy broadcast-grade iron on both ends. The saturation arrives gradually and never gets hard-edged. Good on vocals, bass, brass, drum buses and anything that needs weight.

Controls

Gain

Range: 0 to +60 dB, continuous. **Default:** 0 dB. The saturation onset is soft and progressive, so there is no point where it suddenly breaks up. It simply gets thicker and more coloured as you go.

Hot Bias

NORM or **HOT**. **Default:** NORM. Runs the tubes hotter. Saturation starts earlier, the warmth and the low-level bloom both increase, the compression knee softens, and the unit's own noise rises very slightly.

Character

Rich and full, with obvious tube character at moderate to high gain. At low levels this mode does something the solid-state modes do not: quiet material opens up and breathes slightly rather than being squeezed, which gives transients a musical push. The heavy transformers contribute weight down the bottom and a broad presence through the mids.

Tip: This is the mode where Mix earns its keep - push Gain somewhere silly, then bring Mix back to 40-60% and you get the weight and the harmonics with the transients still intact underneath. Hot Bias is not just more, either: the softer knee means it starts working earlier and lets go more gently, which on a vocal reads as consistency rather than as saturation. Try it at moderate gain on a take that keeps jumping out of the mix, before you reach for a compressor.

Clean Mode

Gain with nothing added. The sonic opposite of the other five - built to leave the source exactly as it found it. Use it when you need level without character, when a source is already perfect, or as the reference you A/B everything else against.

Controls

Gain

Range: 0 to +66 dB, continuous. **Default:** 0 dB. Linear all the way up to the point where the signal approaches the ceiling. There is no gradual warming on the way.

Impedance

HI-Z or **LO-Z**. **Default:** HI-Z. LO-Z opens the top end up slightly, which is what low impedance loading does for ribbon microphones. It is the only tonal feature this mode has.

Character

The cleanest preamp in fPre. At moderate gain it is effectively transparent: no harmonics, no compression, no colour. When you do overdrive it, it clips hard and sharply rather than saturating, which is exactly why you do not want to get there. Watch the output meter and keep it in the linear range.

Per-unit character is the tightest of all six modes. The differences between two Clean instances are extremely subtle, which is the point of a transparent preamp.

Tip: *Clean is the honesty check - A/B against any other mode, matched for level, to hear exactly what that mode is adding. It is also a real choice rather than a null setting: on a source with its own strong character, a great ribbon on brass or a beautifully played acoustic, adding a second personality often muddies the first. LO-Z on ribbons is worth trying every time.*

Germanium Mode

Soft, woolly and full of character. Germanium saturates earlier and more gently than anything else here, with a warm, even-harmonic colour and a natural gentle compression that arrives before you have asked for it. Superb on bass, drums, electric guitar and anything you want to sound old.

Controls

Gain

Range: 0 to +55 dB, continuous. **Default:** 0 dB. The lowest headroom of any mode - it starts colouring at moderate levels, well before the others do.

Pad

OFF or **ON**. **Default:** OFF. Drops the signal before the gain stage. Use it to keep a hot source out of saturation, or to get more Gain travel before the colour arrives.

Warmth

NORM or **WARM**. **Default:** NORM. Brings the saturation on earlier, pushes more even harmonics, thickens the low end, and increases the unit's slow gain drift.

Character

Even-order harmonics dominate, giving a smooth, rounded tone, and the top end softens as the mode saturates - that is the characteristic woolly quality. There is also a slow, gentle breathing in the gain that never quite repeats, and every unit does it at its own rate and depth.

Germanium components were famously inconsistent, and this mode is where you will hear the difference between two fPre instances most clearly.

Tip: *Bass guitar with Gain around +25 and Warmth on is the headline sound, and on drums the natural compression does a lot of work before you reach for a compressor at all. The drift is also why this mode sits so well on a static, programmed part - a sequenced bass or a sampled loop gains a movement through Germanium that no automation quite fakes, because it is never in the same place twice. If it gets too woolly, that is the top end rolling off as it saturates: back the Gain off, or switch to British.*

Console Mode

The channel amplifier of a mixing desk. Cleaner than British, more characterful than Clean, and it holds together on everything - which is precisely what a desk channel has to do. Reach for it when you want cohesion across a lot of tracks rather than an effect on one.

Controls

Gain

Range: 0 to +60 dB, continuous. **Default:** 0 dB. Clean and composed at low settings. As you push, the amp starts to round off the fastest transients and add a snap of its own on the way through.

Iron

IN or OUT. Default: IN. IN runs the signal through the input transformer for low-end weight and a gentle softening at the very top. OUT is the electronically balanced input: cleaner, more open, less weight.

Character

Clean and controlled with subtle console character. The transient snap is the thing to listen for - it firms up drums and percussion in a way no EQ does. Push the Gain to bring it out.

Tip: Put Console on everything and drive each channel a little - that is the sound of a whole desk, and it is what this mode is for. Iron IN for weight on drums and bass, Iron OUT for clarity on acoustic guitar and vocals. Modest gain across many tracks beats heavy gain on one: the cohesion people describe from mixing on a desk is cumulative, twenty channels each doing a small, similar thing. If you are only putting it on one track, use British or Tube and commit.

Actions and Header Controls

Gain Match

A one-shot button that estimates a sensible Output Trim from your current Gain setting. It is an estimate, not a precise loudness match - fine-tune by ear. Above +24 dB of Gain it can only give back so much, so set the rest by hand.

Reset

Returns the current mode's controls to their defaults. Other modes, the Quality setting and the unit's serial (its character) are kept.

Save Patch Card / Load Patch Card

Save Patch Card writes the whole unit - every setting across all six modes, plus the serial - to a patch card file. Load Patch Card reads one back in and, if the card carries a serial, asks whether to recall that whole unit or just apply its settings (see Units and Patch Cards).

Note: *If the preamp sounds different after reloading a session, the serial is saved with the session so the character should be identical - check whether a patch card was loaded with Apply Settings Only, which keeps your current unit rather than restoring the saved one.*

Header controls

Mode selects British, American, Tube, Clean, Germanium or Console, and the panel changes to match. Quality selects Eco, Studio or Master (see Quality). Reset Engine clears any fault and resets the DSP without changing your control values. The Fault indicator appears only on invalid audio; click Reset Engine to clear it. Help opens the built-in help window. The Unit button and the serial sit at the far left (see Units and Patch Cards).

Meters

Stereo input meters sit on the left (IL, IR) and stereo output meters on the right (OL, OR), showing the levels in real time. Click a meter to switch it between Peak and RMS - the label reads PK or RMS to show which mode it is in. Each meter toggles on its own.

Peak follows the instantaneous highest sample level, so it jumps with every transient and shows the true maximum the signal reaches. RMS shows the average energy over a short window, so it sits steadier and reads much closer to how loud the signal actually sounds - the classic VU-style reading.

The small red LED at the top of each meter lights when that side reaches full scale, and holds briefly so you catch it. The input meters read after Input Trim, so they show what the preamp is actually being fed.

Tip: Use Peak to watch headroom and make sure nothing is clipping. Use RMS to judge loudness and to balance one part against another by how loud they actually sound. Peak for safety, RMS for balance.

Automation

Every on-screen control in every mode is exposed to your DAW and can be written and read through its automation lanes like any other parameter, including the Mode selector itself. The Quality selector is the one exception - it is a CPU setting rather than a mix control, so it is deliberately kept out of the automation lanes. The complete state of all six modes, including the serial, is saved with your session.

Recipes

Starting points, not rules. Every unit is a little different, so trust your ears and move from here.

Each recipe starts from defaults: hit Reset first, then set only the controls listed - everything else stays where it is. Gain starts at 0 dB in every mode, and in British the EQ starts OUT, so any recipe using the EQ or the HPF has to switch it IN. Every recipe gets louder as you dial it, so set Output Trim, or press Gain Match, before you judge the sound.

Forward vocal (British)

EQ IN, HPF 80, Low 60 Hz +3, High 12k +3, Gain +20. Weight underneath, air on top, rumble gone. The bread-and-butter British vocal.

Presence lift (British)

EQ IN, Mid 3.2k +5, Gain +15. Pushes a vocal or a guitar forward through a busy mix without raising its level.

Thick bass (British)

EQ IN, Low 110 Hz +5, Gain +30, Impedance 300. The low shelf and the heavier loading working together. Big, and saturated enough to sit still in a mix.

Snare crack (American)

Gain +35, Transformer 3:1. Attack intact, body added underneath. Try Pad ON with Gain +45 if the source is already hot.

Open drum room (American)

Gain +25, Transformer NORM, Mix 70%. Colour and size, with the transients still living in the dry signal.

Creamy vocal (Tube)

Gain +25, Hot Bias HOT. Warm, thick and forgiving. Add Input +6 to push it further without touching Gain.

Parallel weight (Tube)

Gain +45, Hot Bias HOT, Mix 50%. Heavy saturation blended under an untouched dry signal. Works on drum buses, bass and dull acoustic guitars.

Old bass (Germanium)

Gain +25, Warmth WARM. Round, soft and compressed without a compressor. The signature Germanium sound.

Dirty guitar (Germanium)

Gain +40, Warmth WARM, Input +6. Woolly, saturated and thoroughly vintage. Back Input off if it goes to mush.

Desk glue (Console)

Gain +12, Iron IN. Put it on every channel and leave it there. Cohesion rather than effect.

Transient firm-up (Console)

Gain +30, Iron OUT. Cleaner low end, with the snap on drums and percussion brought forward.

Straight level (Clean)

Gain to taste, nothing else. When a source is already right and you only need more of it. LO-Z if it is a ribbon microphone.

Two-preamp stereo

Two fPre instances on a stereo pair, hard left and right, same mode and same settings. Each unit's own character makes the two sides differ slightly, which widens the image in a way a single stereo instance cannot.

Units and Patch Cards

fPre's character lives in its serial number. There are two ways to keep and move your work: units (the character) and patch cards (the whole setup).

The unit menu

A unit is fPre's character on its own - its serial and the analogue voice that serial produces, with no settings attached. The Unit button by the serial opens the menu:

Menu item	What it does
New Unit	Roll a fresh unit with a new serial and a new voice. Your settings stay put; only the personality changes.
Save Unit...	Save the current unit so you can recall it later. Saved units live in Documents/fBox Units/fPre.
Load saved unit	Recall a unit you saved, or browse for a unit file.
Recall my pinned unit	Jump back to your pinned default - handy if you rolled a new one by mistake, or after unpinning.
Pin this unit as my default	Make this unit the one every new instance opens with. This is how you keep one unit for good.
Use a new unit each time	Go back to a fresh unit on each new instance. Your pinned unit is not deleted, just set aside.

Patch cards

A patch card is a portable copy of the whole unit - its serial and every setting across all six modes - written to a single file. Your unit is also saved with your session; a patch card is for carrying a unit between instances and projects. Save Patch Card writes the current unit to a patch card, a file you choose the home for. Load Patch Card reads one back in: if the card was saved on a different unit, it asks how to bring it in:

Option	What it does
Recall Unit	Bring back the exact unit the card was saved on - its character and all its settings, the box as it was saved.
Apply Settings Only	Keep your current unit and drop the saved settings on top. Same knobs, your machine.

A patch card carries its identity, so a card saved for a different fBox product is refused with a note.

Important: *In one line: a unit is the character; a patch card is the character plus every setting on top of it. Both save the serial, so the exact voice comes back with them.*

Quality

The Quality selector trades CPU against fidelity on the analogue path:

Tier	Use
Eco	Full analogue character at the lowest CPU. Great for tracking and dense sessions.
Studio	Higher-fidelity processing throughout, with richer saturation on the analogue path. The default, and the sweet spot for most work.
Master	The highest quality, and the most CPU. For final mixes and mastering.

Tip: *Studio for normal work, Eco if your machine is struggling, Master for the final print.*

Performance and CPU

The quality of the analogue stages costs CPU. fPre gives you the same Eco / Studio / Master control the rest of the range uses, so you can mix light and render heavy. Mix at Studio, or drop to Eco if your machine struggles - the sound still plays, just at lighter quality - then switch to Master when you render.

Cost also varies by mode, since each one runs a different signal path. If you are running fPre on a lot of tracks and your machine is complaining, the mode you chose matters as well as the quality tier.

Tip: Close editor windows you are not using, and freeze or bounce tracks (a DAW feature that temporarily renders a track to audio to save CPU) once you have committed to a sound. If you hear clicks or pops, increase your DAW's buffer size or drop to Eco.

What fPre Writes To Your Computer

For transparency, here is everything fPre writes and where. It writes nowhere else, and sends nothing anywhere unless you choose to.

Folder	Contents
Documents/fBox/Diagnostics	Plain-text diagnostic logs, a folder per product, kept so a crash can be worked out afterwards. Loaded inside the Console or the Rack, fPre logs alongside that host.
Documents/fBox Units/fPre	Your saved units, so you can find, back up and share them.
AppData/Roaming/fBoxAudio (Windows)	Your licence, and a small settings file recording which unit you have pinned.

Patch cards go wherever you save them. The unit's own state lives in your session, not in a file of its own. Nothing is filed away somewhere you did not pick, and nothing is written to your Desktop.

When something goes wrong

Diagnostics are written automatically as fPre runs and survive a crash or freeze. If you hit a problem, zip the whole Documents/fBox/Diagnostics folder and email it to support@fboxaudio.com - send the entire folder, since what else was running alongside fPre often explains the problem. Tell us what you were doing, what you expected, and what happened. The logs are plain text; you are welcome to read them, but you do not need to.

Analogue Character

Every instance of fPre generates a unique serial number, shown in the watermark at the far left of the header. It defines the unit's hardware character throughout the signal path.

On real analogue hardware, no two units off the same line sound identical. Push two preamps to the same level and one will glow where the other growls. The saturation starts at its own point. The iron has its own resonance and its own weight down the bottom. The top end softens at its own rate, and each unit has its own quiet self-noise underneath it all. Germanium is the wildest of the six - real germanium transistors were famously inconsistent, and so are ours.

fPre models these variations throughout. No single one is obvious in isolation. The cumulative effect is what gives each unit its voice - the same serial always produces the same unit, different serials produce different units, and the serial is saved with your session (DAW, Console, Standalone or Rack) and with any unit or patch card you keep.

Tip: *You cannot dial a unit's character to order any more than you can a real one - but you can learn it, and you can keep it. Find one you love, pin it, and it is the preamp you open every time. If you want two identical units, save a patch card from one and load it on the other with Recall Unit - the serial and all its character transfer with the card.*

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