

EMPIRICAL LABS EL-8 DISTRESSOR

British Mode Option

The Empirical Labs EL-8 Distressor single-channel compressor immediately turned heads when it was introduced in '96. The unit's ratio settings call up four alternate circuit paths, each having its own distinct personality, making the Distressor one of the most versatile compressors on the market. Additionally, second- and third-harmonic distortion can be added to the audio path to simulate tube or analog tape saturation.

The Distressor's recently released British Mode option brings even more excitement and flexibility to the party. The option can be ordered for a new Distressor or retrofitted to any unit you already own and costs only \$100. (Without British Mode, the Distressor's list price is \$1,499; list is \$1,599 with the option.) Enabled by a front panel switch (the retrofit also includes an associated status LED), British Mode changes the unit's attack and release reference voltages to create totally new time constants and curves for all ratios and circuit paths. Empirical Labs' guiding inspiration here was to emulate the UREI 1176LN. In fact, with a fast manual attack time dialed in, British Mode makes a Distressor sound startlingly similar to an 1176LN with two or more ratio buttons pushed in.

British Mode serves up an absolutely savage "power pop" snare drum sound that is to die for. It also sounds stunning on electric guitar with a 20:1 ratio switched in, imparting a wonderful crunchy attack. On vocals (with the "1:1" ratio setting chosen), British Mode produces a clear, in-your-face quality much like an 1176LN. For comparison purposes, the 1176LN offers a bit more presence. But the Distressor's British Mode does a surprisingly authentic emulation of that distinctive "over-the-top" compression curve that the 1176LN is famous for.

Bottom line: British Mode kills. Whether you already own a Distressor or are thinking of buying a new unit, you owe it to yourself to order the British Mode option. This is the Holy Grail at a bargain price. I'm buying!