

## Column by Renzo van Riemsdijk (Masterenzo):

### Great stuff

Of course I cannot resist myself in writing another column about outboard gear.

I will elaborate on the necessity (according to many of the mastering engineers) of those wonderful machines.

Nowadays there's a growing group of engineers who master ITB. ITB stands for In The Box, meaning that no outboard apparatus or AD/DA converter is used to master the songs. Only plug-ins are used. Like I said in my previous column an analog eq or compressor will most definitely lead you smoothly towards your goal. It's the same with plug-ins. You "just" have to know your gear, analog or digital, they both are equally important.

A rack of great analog outboard gear can be of great help to get the results you're after. They look great, feel great, work great and many of us (mastering or mix) engineers regard those babies kind of as our own children. But what about their digital counterparts? Emulations of those exact pieces of analog gear, very clever and very powerful and good sounding.

The person who would have said about ten years ago that you could master a recording using only plug-ins was declared mentally ill. Plug-ins made a big leap forward since the last decade or so. They have become good, actually very good! By now it's sometimes hard (if not impossible) to distinguish a difference in sound between a piece of outboard and its plug-in counterpart.

So more and more mastering engineers get rid of their analog pieces and master ITB.

But still, turning knobs, levers and switches is fun! It's that analog feel that is irresistible. Plus the pieces look stunningly beautiful.

Well, technique hasn't stood still: even for plug-ins there's a device on the market that can control slides and pots within a plug-in. If you Google "nob control" you'll find, logically, the *nOb control*. nOb is a beautiful small wooden enclosure housing an equally beautiful brass knob. It does its job without installing anything and works very easy: just place the mouse pointer on the knob or lever you wish to control, turn the big knob and you'll see the value of the plug-in change while turning.

A fine piece of German engineering to bring the analog feel into the digital domain.

For me it's still a long way towards the digital-only era. I'm a sucker for analog pieces. It's the same with streaming versus vinyl or cd. I just love to actually play a whole record, to hear the cohesion between songs and to hear the story an artist has to tell with that album.

I'll end this story about outboard gear with the most well known line among the makers and producers of great music:

"It's the engineer, it's *not* the gear!"

Renzo

*Renzo (Masterenzo) is a Rotterdam based Dutch mastering engineer. He has worked for Gery Mendes (GMB), The Legendary Orchestra Of Love and Phil Bee's Freedom. More info about mastering and about Masterenzo can be found on his [website](#).*