BAND MODE
Choose from split, broadband or an adjustable combination of the two

LISTEN
Monitor just the filters or applied compression using the listen icons

FILTERS
Use the high and low-pass filters to specify your target frequencies

MODE
Process the full stereo signal or focus specifically on the mid or side components

METERS
Use these to check the output level and gain reduction

BRIGHTEN
Rejuvenate your de-essed signal with this post-processing high-frequency boost

COMPRESSION HISTORY GRAPH
View which parts of the signal are being processed

THRESHOLD/AMOUNT
Use these controls to set up when and by how much the de-essing is applied

Solid State Logic
DeEss £89 PC MAC

De-essing can be a tricky thing to get right. Maybe this new plugin from SSL can help you crack it

> DeEss (VST, VST3, AU, AAX) from Solid State Logic is a new advanced de-esser plugin with a raft of cool features. Based around a detector circuit with super smooth high and low-pass Butterworth filters (third order), the plugin combines traditional features with some quite innovative ones, and is designed for both typical vocal de-essing and program material. With that in mind you'll find the default stereo mode is joined by MS modes Mid and Side. There's also a Blend slider providing continuous adjustment

between broadband and split band operation modes. Next, a Brighten control adds back high frequencies after the de-essing process. And finally you've got Oversample and Lookahead options to tweak the overall sonic performance.

DeEss's interface includes plenty of visual feedback with a filter graph at the top, where you can also adjust the filter cutoffs, and a compression history graph at the bottom. Meanwhile on the right-hand side you'll find gain reduction and output meters. The core

compression controls are Amount (0 to 200%) and Threshold (0 to -24dB), and the latter is relative rather than absolute (see *Relative threshold* for explanation). If at any stage you're confused, the optional tool tips will usually save you a trip to the manual.

Process
Getting started is really straightforward and you've got a selection of vocal and instrument presets. These apply task-focused filter settings,

You actually feel like you're in control of the essing and can choose how you want to process it

which is handy, leaving you to concentrate on setting the Amount and Threshold. If you want to start from scratch or simply want to hear what's going on, there's a filter sidechain listen option. This also works alongside Auto Listen, which if selected will activate the listen mode whenever you change the filter settings. You'll find the compressor also has a listen function for monitoring just the compressed audio. This also works with the Auto Listen for both Threshold and Amount parameters.

So how does it perform in practice? We tried DeEss on a number of different vocal performances, and have to say it coped very well. The relative threshold is pretty easy to set, which means we spent more time focusing on the sidechain filter settings and using the Blend control to decide how much of the signal to compress. In fact, these two aspects are so flexible that you actually feel like you're in control of the essing and can choose how you want to process it rather than just try to minimise it the best you can. For example, sometimes broadband de-essing, even of vocals, simply works better in context than split processing. With DeEss you have that option, but can also gradually back away from fully broadband to finesse the outcome. Couple that with independent low and high-pass filters and you really are spoilt for choice.

Understandably, this bodes well for treating program material or stereo blends, and the more we used DeEss the more we appreciated it as a frequency specific dynamics processor and not just a de-esser. That said, using the Mid and Side modes does require some care, particularly on program material, as both options can influence the stereo image.

DeEss's relative threshold gives you consistent de-essing across the whole performance

Relative threshold

Most de-essers are straightforward frequency specific dynamics processors that use a fixed level threshold. This is simple to understand but also means they don't handle variations in level very well, and it's quite easy to end up overprocessing loud sibilance and underprocessing quiet sibilance. To resolve this issue, DeEss uses a relative threshold. This helps to retain consistent de-esser behaviour across the whole performance no matter how loud or quiet it is. It also means that if you make changes in level prior to the DeEss plugin, it won't completely undermine your settings, so DeEss should de-ess by the same amount as before. As there's no absolute threshold value, it's not possible to plot a straight line threshold on the compression history graph. Nevertheless, the graph does include two tone shading and although this doesn't display precisely when the threshold is reached, it does give an idea of the gain reduction applied.

All told this is a very decent de-esser. It's easy to use, with great features and excellent visuals, and is well up there with the market leaders. **cm**

Web solidstatelogic.com
Info Perpetual licence included in monthly subscription plan

DeEss's interface provides excellent visual feedback, including filter and compression history graphs

Alternatively

FabFilter Pro-DS
cm187 » 10/10 » £134
A powerful plugin with excellent visual feedback, loads of features and vocal and full program modes

Brainworx SPL De-Essers
$149
Go authentic with these classic single band and dual band SPL emulating de-esser designs

Verdict

For Low and high-pass filters with smooth Butterworth profile
Effect listening for both compression and filters, with automatic listen option
Stereo, mid and side processing
Relative threshold for easy setup

Against Not much

Ease of use and excellent visuals make this feature packed de-esser one of the best we've tried

10/10