

FRACTAL AUDIO – POWER UP AND TAKE OFF

...the tutorial for AXE-FX III, FM9 and FM3 greenhorns!

A Few Warm Words of Welcome

You are probably wondering if this tutorial is at all suitable for you...

You have no doubt visited our support page at <https://www.g66.eu/en/support/g66-support> and downloaded the handbook. You may even have read some of it. If you did, and felt rather lost, with no real idea of how or where to begin, then this is just what you need – **welcome to the Fractal Audio Beginner's Guide!** This tutorial will help you to clear the first hurdles easily and quickly.



If you have already successfully worked with multi-effects devices or owned a previous-generation Fractal Audio product and your first experiments with your new acquisition have posed no problems, then this tutorial probably won't contain much new information for you. Of course, that doesn't have to stop you from reading it – it might even still be fun.

We won't go into the differences between previous generations and the current line-up here. If you've already owned an older Fractal Audio modeller you are no longer a beginner and will likely want to find out the differences for yourself. This guide is not intended to replace the handbook and we certainly can't explain everything that's in it. We would simply like to help you reach a stage where you'll be able to get the most out of the handbook and give you the important information that you might be missing.

What we will do first of all is take a look at what actually happens to your guitar tone when it travels through the Axe-Fx III, FM9 or FM3; we will take an existing sound and change it to suit your taste and then, if you like, we can save it.



Of course, while we are doing all this, you will have ample opportunity to discover what exactly such a saved sound is and what it's made up of.

First Steps

So, here you are with your Axe-Fx III, FM9 or FM3 connected to something and you can hear it. You've probably tried turning the Value dial and listened to a few different sounds. And what now?

Let's start our journey through your box of tricks with some of the many factory presets. (Later we'll explain what factory presets are.)

Turn on your device, wait for it to boot and then you will see the normal *Home* screen, which allows you to choose which sound you want to use. Of course, you don't need to turn it off and on again to get to this screen...

If you ever feel like you are lost in one of the menus: just press the **HOME** button and you will go straight back to the Home screen.

The very first time you turn on the unit the preset with the number 000 is active. Your device will always remember the last preset you used, however, so the next time you turn it on, exactly that preset will be active.



The preset you have currently selected will probably be different from the one shown in the picture above. Turn the **VALUE** dial to the left and the right a bit to get a feel for it. Connect your guitar, play a bit and see how the sound changes as you turn the dial. See if you can select the preset shown in the picture above. The screen in the picture is an older version, so yours will look slightly different, but the most important thing is the large yellow line with the number and name of the preset.

You might have the number *038* instead of *039* in front of *ODS 100*. In the manual you will find information on how to make the Axe-Fx III, FM9 or FM3 begin counting at 000 or 001. For the moment let's just leave it set the way it is.

Here the name of the preset, *ODS 100*, coincides with the name of the amp simulation used. This does not have to be the case. Many of the factory presets are designed to showcase the various amp models contained in the Axe-Fx III, FM9 or FM3 and have thus been given the same name as the relevant amp. When you make your own presets, you can give them any name you like.

Play some more guitar to prepare you for what is to come. Is your guitar a bit out of tune? Strike an open string and keep an eye on the two green arrows at the top of the screen. This mini-tuner is always active, but there is also a full-scale tuner. Have a look at the bottom of the screen – you will see the word *TUNER* above push-encoder **A**.

Push-encoder? That's right: the knobs **A** to **E** can not only be turned, but also pushed. The framed, white words at the bottom of the display show the current "push" functions for all five knobs. These

functions will change depending on which page the display is showing. Push-encoder is a bit of a mouthful, though, so we'll just refer to them as knobs like everyone else...

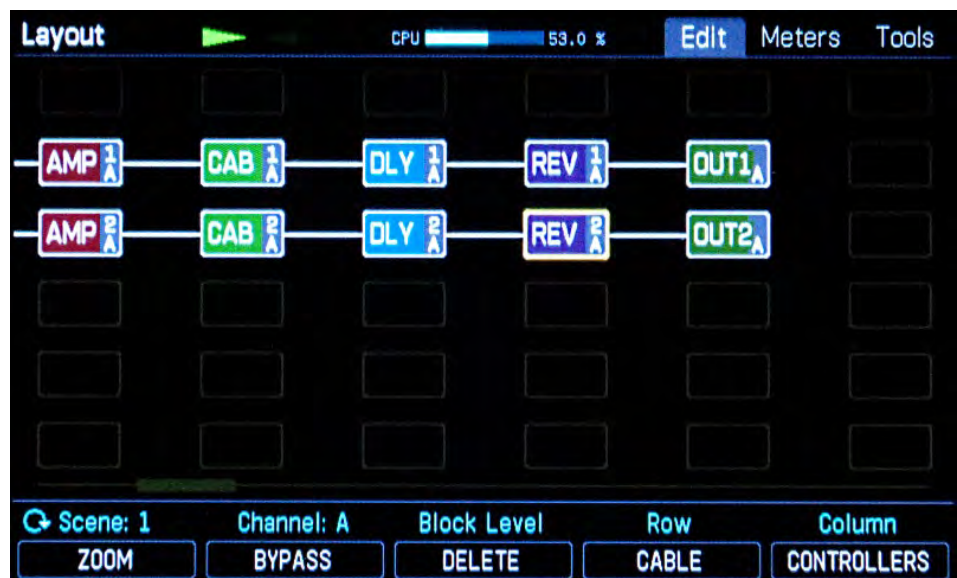
Let's try that out. Press knob **B**, the one with *TUNER* written above it, and you will see a very attractive tuner that works as well as it looks. Once you've tuned your guitar, press the **HOME** button to return to where you started.

The lion's share of the Home screen is devoted to a list of the 8 "scenes" contained in the preset. In simple terms, each scene is like a snapshot of the preset, storing the on/off state of the various effects and their channel settings. You will find lots about this in the manual. For a basic idea of what it all means for you, turn knob **A** to select a different scene. Which one you have selected is shown in light blue at the top of the display. With some presets this might make no difference, but anywhere where the scenes have names you will instantly hear the difference and recognise what is going on: same basic sound, different variation.

Do you like what you hear? Later in the tutorial we'll show you how to change it.

Now press **LAYOUT** to get to the Layout screen. Can't find a button called LAYOUT? Don't worry – it's at the bottom of the screen, above knob **B**. You can check that it has worked by looking at the top left corner of the display. There you will always find the name of the current screen, in this case, *Layout*.

Take a look at the rest of the top line. You will see *Edit*, *Meters*, and *Tools*. These tabs tell you the names of the pages contained in the Layout screen. Press the **PAGE >>** button a couple of times and then the **<< PAGE** button a couple of times to get a feel for navigating between the pages. Make sure the *Edit* tab is active before we continue, as that is what we are going to concentrate on next.



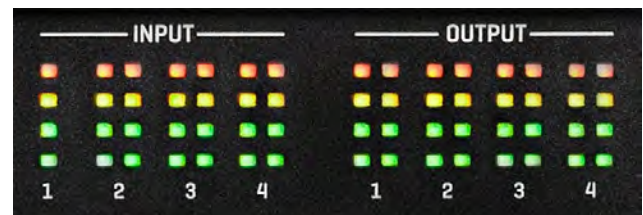
The signal chain in your modeller

The Layout grid shows the signal chain of the currently selected preset.

The sound simply goes from *IN* on the left, through the various connected blocks, to *OUT* on the right, with each block adding its own particular mojo to the sound.

Your Layout grid may look a little different from the one in our picture. That's quite normal; every preset has its own layout, but the principle is the same everywhere.

On the far left is *IN1* – that's the input, where the guitar signal enters the device. Well, okay, it's a bit more complicated than that. You've probably connected your guitar lead into the front **INSTR** jack – that's a mono input. And that's okay, as most guitars are mono – and that's why there is only one column of LEDs on the front panel for Input 1.



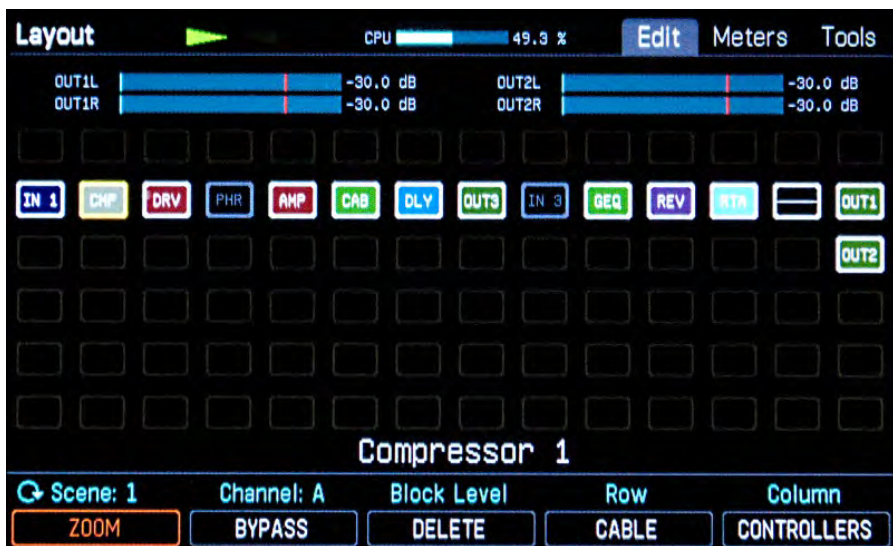
Of course, you can also feed any current Fractal Audio modeller with stereo signals. The connections for this are on the back of the device and to find out how it all works, have a look at the manual.

Your guitar tone is converted into a digital signal and then arrives at the *IN1* point in the Layout screen. The default setting for the Axe-Fx III, FM9 and FM3 is to place the guitar in the middle of the stereo field, in other words the same signal goes to the right as to the left. This can all be changed, of course, but that would be too much for this tutorial, so we'll stick to the default state. The remaining inputs, when in use, show up as *IN2*, *IN3* etc.



In the picture above you can see that your guitar signal travels through various blocks on its way from the input to the output. Rather than just lying around the place, these blocks are arranged in a grid of 6 rows and 14 columns in the Axe-Fx III and FM9, and 4 rows and 12 columns in the FM3. In the normal Layout screen only six of these columns are visible at any one time, but there are two ways to see the rest of them:

- First, try using the four **NAV** buttons to see what happens. One block always has a yellow frame around it; this signifies that it is selected. When you go over the right edge of the screen with the **>** button, the display moves accordingly. A small scroll bar shows your location over the grid.
- While this view can be very comfortable – the blocks are large and show extra information – sometimes it's nice to get the big picture. For this we have the *Zoom* mode. Press knob **A**, which is marked *ZOOM*. As you can see, some of the "push" functions of the knobs can be active or inactive, with the active state being shown by orange letters.



In the picture above, you'll see a small box with the letters *CMP* to the right of *IN 1*. As you might have already guessed, this represents a compressor simulation. And have you noticed that the *PHR* and *IN3* blocks are greyed out? That means that these two blocks are inactive, while the coloured blocks are active.

The next-to-last block on the far right only has a horizontal line, with no letters; this type of block is called a *Shunt*. We'll come back to that later. The abbreviations for the blocks become obvious after a while; the Drive block is called *DRV*, the Amp block is *AMP*, etc.

Now let's turn on the drive, to hear how it sounds. Should you happen to be in a preset that has no

DRV block, press the **HOME** button, choose another preset and press *LAYOUT* again. Keep doing this until you find a suitable preset.

If we want to do anything with the *DRV* block, we first need to select it. This basically just means we have to navigate to it. As you already know, we can do this with the four **NAV** buttons. ☞ Make your way to the *DRV* block and notice how the word *BYPASS* above knob **B** changes when you select an active (coloured) block as opposed to an inactive (greyed-out) block. Once you have selected the *DRV* block, press *BYPASS* (knob **B**) – this turns the selected block on or off. Switch between the two states a few times, keeping an eye on the display and an ear open for the difference in sound – it's time to play some guitar again anyway. By the way, you should now see that the *EDITED* LED is lit. More on that later.

Have you noticed the thin white lines between the blocks? These are the “cables” connecting the blocks together. Let's see what happens when a cable is missing. You've probably guessed already...

☞ Select one of the blocks and then press the **ENTER** button. The selected block and the one next to it will now be blinking in anticipation of something happening. Press **ENTER** again and the cable between the two blocks will disappear. Play something on your guitar – as you can hear, you can't hear anything. How could you? There's no cable there anymore. This is an important thing to remember, especially later when you start building your own presets – forgetting to add a cable somewhere is the most common mistake of them all.

☞ Now let's put the cable back quickly. Select the same block again and press **ENTER** once more. The two blocks will begin to blink again, this time in anticipation of being reunited. Keep them waiting and press the up or down **NAV** buttons. As you can see, you can select which block to connect to. Connecting to an empty block would obviously not make much sense, but it is important to know that each block can be connected to any of the six blocks in the column before it and any of the six in the column after it. Now press the correct **NAV** button to return to the block we wanted to reconnect and press **ENTER** again. The cable is now back in place and so is your sound.

☞ Now it should be no problem for you to navigate through the signal chain. Try turning each of the blocks on and off listen to how they change the sound.

The Axe-Fx III, FM9 and FM3 have an armada of effects in addition to the blocks that are built into the preset you are using at the moment. In the manual you will find all the information you could possibly need about each one of them.

A few paragraphs ago we briefly touched on a very important block. This one is displayed with no letters on it and is called a *shunt*. A shunt does just what it looks like it should – it is simply a connection from left to right, with no effect on the sound. In presets where we don't need or don't want so many effects, shunts allow us to get from the input on the far left to the output on the far right.

Let's try that out. ☞ Navigate to a block in the signal chain that you don't need. Once there, turn the large **VALUE** dial. Which direction you turn it in is of little consequence for now. Watch how the lettering on the selected block and the information at the bottom of the display change as you make your way through the available effects. Keep turning until you see *SHUNT* and then press **ENTER**. You have now replaced the original block with a shunt. Should you be having problems finding the shunt, here is a quick tip: turn the dial clockwise – the effects will then be displayed in alphabetical order. After the wah at the end of the list you will find *NONE* (no block) and then *SHUNT*, before the list starts again from the beginning. If you would rather not change the block just now, press **EXIT** instead of **ENTER**. **EXIT** generally allows you to leave a menu setting without making any changes, whereas **ENTER** will mostly confirm a change.

The far right of the signal chain is generally the output. Input and output must be connected to each other, otherwise you won't be able to hear anything. You can, however, have input or output blocks anywhere you like in the grid. For example, you might want to have an output somewhere before the cab-simulation, so that you can send a signal to a real power amp and cabinet as well as having a signal for the PA. How you can do all this is covered in the manual.

☞ Now press the **HOME** button to return to the start screen. You may have noticed that the *EDITED* LED is lit. This lights up as soon as you change anything in the current preset – and by turning

individual effects on and off you have changed things. The *EDITED* light comes on whenever you turn the Value dial while in an effects menu or control menu and stays on until you save the sound or choose another preset.

Presets, sounds and all that stuff

Now that we've been throwing jargon around for a while, it might be a good idea to explain some of it. You've just seen how the guitar signal makes its way through your modeller: Drive, Chorus, Amp, Cab, Reverb and so on. And as you have probably already realised, you have a lot of freedom as to how you arrange all these blocks. When you have decided on all that and are happy with the sound you have created, you can save it as a preset – the Axe-Fx III has 1024 preset slots to choose from and the FM9 and FM3 have 512. In each one of these slots you can save a complete virtual pedalboard with all the effects you want, in exactly the order you want them and with all the necessary cables connecting them together. The state of each effect (active or bypassed) also gets saved. But there's more: all the internal settings (also called parameters) for each effect are also saved. For example, in an Amp block that would be the knobs for Gain, Bass, Middle, Treble, Presence, Volume, etc.

Such a prepared sound that has been saved in a memory slot is known as a preset. (Some people also call them patches – that's fine, too.) The factory presets that are installed on the device are intended to show off the various amp simulations and give the user some idea of what is possible with the available effects. Feel free to change them any time you like. All 1024 (or 512) memory slots are equal and all can be edited. Should you decide you want to go back to the factory presets you can easily reinstall them via USB. Just download them from our support page (the address is at the beginning of this tutorial) along with Fractal-Bot, an easy-to-use tool for everything to do with loading presets and updating firmware.

You may also have heard the word *bank* used in this context. Banks were invented to make keeping track of so many presets a little easier and are basically a way of dividing the memory slots into groups. These groups are named alphabetically, i.e. A, B, C, etc., and each one contains 128 presets. The Axe-Fx III has eight banks, while the FM9 and FM3 have four.

Generally speaking, it's pretty irrelevant which bank you save a preset in. However, if you intend to use your Axe-Fx III, FM9 or FM3 for live gigs, you need to be aware that some midi foot-controllers can only call up bank A. In this case, you would only have the first 128 sounds at your feet (which would probably be enough for most gigs, but all the same...). The Fractal Audio foot controllers FC-6 and FC-12 are perfectly suited for use with our current modellers and can, of course, call up all their presets.

So, to sum up: you can save your complete, fully cabled, virtual set-up with amp, cab, effects and all the relevant settings as a *preset*. Depending on your device you have 512 or 1024 memory slots for presets and they are arranged in *banks* of 128 presets each. The first three banks - memory locations 000-383 - are not empty at the beginning, but are filled with *Factory Presets*.

Should you want to build a sound from scratch and prefer not to use a factory preset as a basis, you can use preset 383 *BYPASS*. This is completely sound-neutral, as it consists entirely of shunts, which you just need to replace with the desired effects blocks.

After all this theory it's time for a break. Look for a nice preset and play some guitar until you feel like reading further.

Changing parameters

You just chose a preset that you liked a lot. In case you didn't, do it now. ☞ Press the **HOME** button and then turn the **VALUE** dial until you find a sound you really like. This one we are going to improve. Press the **LAYOUT** knob to get to the *Layout* screen. Then use the **NAV** buttons to get to the Amp block and press **EDIT**.

Now let's play around with some of the parameters in the Amp block or, in other words, let's edit it. With the other effect blocks the process is exactly the same: select the desired effect block in the layout grid and then press **EDIT**.

Most effects blocks have so many parameters that they have to be spread over several pages, but the good news is that the most important parameters are always on the first page. In the Amp block this is the *Type* page, where you can select the desired amp simulation you want to use.

☞ If this page is not the one being shown, press the << **PAGE** button until you get to it. You will now see a huge list of around 300 amp models, with the current one highlighted. ☞ By turning the **VALUE** dial you can select a different one.

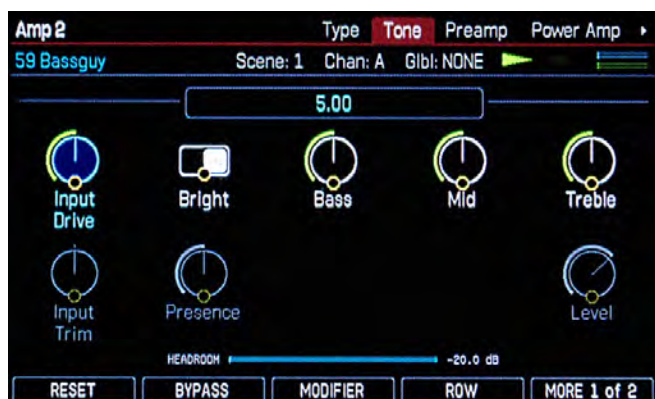
☞ Try a few different amp models out and play some guitar with each one to get used to the basic sound. The list is much too long to fit on one screen and you will have to do quite a bit of turning if you want to go from one end of it to the other...

Keep in mind that it's a good idea to really invest some time into getting to know an amp model – you need to learn its playing characteristics and change a few parameters to be able to get the most out of it. And of course, for many amps you really need a suitable cabinet, which is selected somewhere else, namely in the Cab block. But for now, let's just keep it simple.

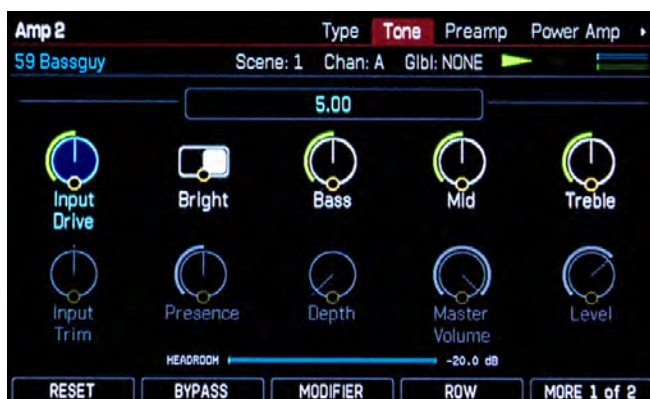
☞ Now press **PAGE** >> to get to the *Tone* page. By default, this is set to AUTHENTIC Mode and shows you the most important controls that you actually find on the original amp. Most of them will be familiar to you from real amps.

The Tone Control Display can also show you other controls that the real amp does not offer; this is the so-called IDEAL Mode.

Go to the **HOME** -> **SETUP** -> **Global Settings** -> **Config** page. Here under *Tone Control Display* you'll find the possibility to switch from **AUTHENTIC** to **IDEAL** Mode.



Tone Control Display: **AUTHENTIC**



Tone Control Display: **IDEAL**

☞ Turn the five push-encoders to adjust the virtual tone knobs, just like you would on a real amp. By pressing knob **D** (*ROW*), you can change from the top row to the bottom row and vice-versa. Try it out. You can also use the **NAV** buttons to select a parameter and then adjust it with the Value dial. Whichever you prefer – it's up to you.

In the top left corner of the screen in our picture you will see *Amp 2*. In both the Axe-Fx III and FM9 you can have two amp blocks running simultaneously. If you are only using one amp model, it is automatically called Amp 1. The same applies to other effects blocks that can be used more than once in the signal chain of a preset.

☞ Now have a look at the other parameter pages by pressing **PAGE** >>. The options for fine-tuning an amp offered here are so detailed that if you wanted to make such changes to a real amp you would need to get your soldering iron out. Here the rule to remember is, "You can do anything, but you don't have to". For most users, the basic parameters are all you ever need to adjust.

Check out the *Advanced* page. This one has so many parameters that they are shown as a list. And this list is so long, that it won't fit on one screen – the scroll bar on the right shows you where you are in the list. Use the **NAV** buttons to select a parameter. When you get to the bottom of the screen and press the down arrow again the visible area of the list will change. As always, turn the

Value dial or one of the knobs to adjust the selected parameter. To the left of the list you'll see the current usage of the five push-encoders. Many of the effects in the Fractal modeller have such an advanced page, allowing subtle changes to the minutest of details.

If you've changed a lot now, you might find that you don't like the sound anymore and would prefer it in its original state again. ☞ To leave your edits without saving, just press **EXIT** or **HOME**. As soon as you select another preset, your changes will be gone.

If you like the sound, you can save it, of course. In this case press **STORE**. You now have the option of choosing another memory location (*Location*) and can also give the sound a new name. To do this use knob **A** to select whether to rename the preset or a scene, knob **B** to move the cursor and knobs **C**, **D** and **E** to change the relevant letters and symbols. In the simplest scenario, you will just want to save over the current preset. To do this press **ENTER** twice.

The process we have just described, *Layout-select-Edit* works for all effects blocks.

And apart from that?

We've now come to the end of our first short journey through the Axe-Fx III, FM9 and FM3 universe. Of course, we've hardly even scratched the surface of what is possible, but this tutorial should give you a pretty solid idea of how to continue. Now you are ready for the real manual. Have a look through it and try as many things out as you can, so that you can really unleash the full potential of your new device. And most important of all, have lots of fun doing it!

E-MAIL TECH SUPPORT

For technical support and *How to...* questions don't hesitate to get in touch our support at support@g66.eu. By the way, there is no such thing as a stupid question, and you will certainly never get a stupid answer from us.

TELEPHONE TECH SUPPORT

For support over the phone our experienced guitarist and Fractal Audio expert Knut is ready to give you help and advice. Tel.: **+49 461 1828094**.



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