NICKY ROMERO
KICKSTART 2

Manual

v2.0.7

Contents

Introduction

Thank you for choosing Nicky Romero Kickstart 2, the quick and easy plugin that's fully dedicated to instant sidechain compression effects. Kickstart 2 is based on the same high-quality DSP algorithms as the award-winning **VolumeShaper** for ShaperBox, but focuses exclusively on ducking effects.

In this manual, we'll guide you through every one of Kickstart 2's controls.

Prefer to watch a video? Then check out the **'How To Use Kickstart 2' video manual**.

So what is sidechaining anyway?

Sidechain ducking is a production technique where the volume of the bassline in a mix is made to automatically drop every time the kick drum hits. This solves the problem of the kick and bassline playing at the same time, which creates a muddled low end, and prevents mixes from "going loud". Sidechain ducking allows the kick to punch through with no bassline in the way, for maximum impact, clarity and definition.

Ducking can be done "invisibly", applied only to the low frequencies so as to improve the mix without the listener being aware that the bassline is ducking around the kick. Or it can be made audible, to give a special groove or "pump" to the sound – check out this example in the drop of 'Paradise' by Nicky Romero & Deniz Koyu.

Traditionally, sidechain ducking is done using a compressor with a sidechain input (hence the name). This requires quite a bit of signal routing and tweaking of compressor settings to get working. And even then, the amount of control you're granted is limited by what the compressor gives you.

Kickstart 2 does away with all that, instead applying specially designed ducking curves directly to your basslines. Just add it to your bass track to get that sidechain compression effect instantly – no compressor required! This is the technique used by most of today's top professional producers. It's faster to set up than actual compression and gives them the precision, consistency and flexibility that only an adjustable ducking curve can deliver.

Many producers will also go beyond the bassline, sidechaining other elements in the track to declutter the mix and make the kick stand out even more. With Kickstart, it's easy to add just the right amount of sidechaining, in all the right places.

System Requirements

Windows

Windows 7, 8, 10 or 11

VST2, VST3 or AAX host sequencer

64-bit

Mac

Mac OS X 10.9 or later

Intel or Apple Silicon (Native/Rosetta) processor

VST2, VST3, AU or AAX host sequencer

Works with Ableton Live, Logic Pro, Pro Tools 12, Cubase, Bitwig Studio, FL Studio, REAPER, Studio One, and many other DAWs that support VST2, VST3, AU or AAX.

Installing and Authorizing Kickstart 2

Having downloaded your Kickstart 2 installer and license file from **your Cableguys account**, double-click the installer and follow the instructions to install the plugin. When you first launch the full (as opposed to demo) version of Kickstart 2 as an audio effect plugin in your DAW, it will request the license file. Simply browse to the license file and confirm your registration in the dialog that appears.

Please see our in-depth **installation and authorisation guide** for more information.

Quick-Start Guide

Don't have time to read the whole manual? This section is for you!

Here's how to start using Kickstart 2 right away:
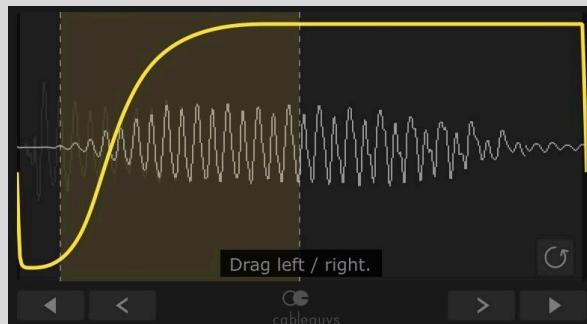
1. **Add Kickstart 2** to your **bassline** (or any other sound you want to duck). By default, Kickstart ducks the signal at the start of every beat, for a classic four-to-the-floor sidechain compression effect.

2. Click the **Sidechain curves** to find one that feels right for your song.
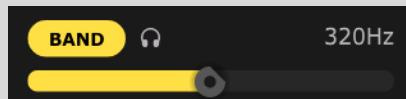
3. Use the big **Mix** knob to set the strength of volume ducking to fit your mix.

4. If the sidechain is too short/long for your kick drum – or you want to play with the feel and groove – drag the **Slope** (coloured area) of the curve. You can also shift the entire curve with the **Shift** arrows.

5. To pump only the lowest frequencies, turn on the **Band** split. Adjust the slider till the kick punches through clearly and the pumping effect seems to "disappear".

6. What if your kick isn't four-to-the-floor? You can use **Audio Trigger** to follow any kick drum's pattern automatically (route the Kick track into the plugin's external sidechain input). Or, use **MIDI Trigger** to program any pattern.
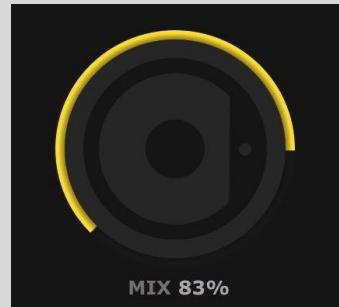
7. For most songs, the default **1/4 Length** option works just fine. For a slower or faster feel, use **1/8** or **1/2** instead.

Controls in Detail

Mix

Use the **Mix** dial to control the strength of ducking . At 0%, you hear the signal without ducking, and at 100%, you'll get the fully ducked signal.

💡TIP: Use automation to vary the Mix knob's position at specific points in your song – varying the ducking between the build-up and the drop, for example.

💡TIP: Use Mix values of 5%-25% for subtle ducking, and higher values of 75%-100% for more obvious pumping.

Curves

Kickstart 2 provides 16 hand-crafted curves for sidechaining, trimming and more, accessed via the bank of buttons at the bottom of the interface. Just click one to load it. Any Slope adjustments (see below) you already made are restored.

Sidechaining (1-8): Essential ducking curves for a range of applications.

Sub bass sidechaining (9-10): Ducking curves tuned specifically for sub bass lines, with slower fade-ups for smoother ducking of low frequencies and greater kick drum impact.

Kick trimming (11-12): Use these to shorten the tails of kick drums and other percussion elements.
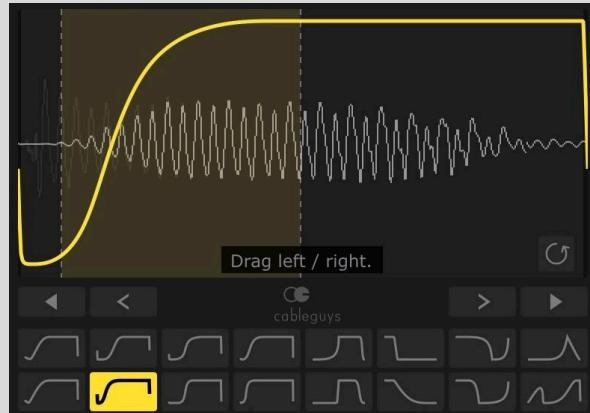
Reverse chain (13-14): 'Inverted sidechain' curves for 'suction' type effects – try it on synths, white noise and other mid/high-frequency sounds.

Rhythm FX (15-16): Add pulsing groove to sustained sounds.

Slope

What if you've found the right sidechain curve, but it's a bit longer or shorter than your kick drum? Ideally, they should match closely, so the bassline is ducked completely out of the kick's way. No problem, this is where Slope comes in.

By dragging on the coloured area of the ducking curve, you can move the sloped part left and right, to adjust how long the ducking will be active.

Slope adjustments are reflected in the **Curve** button graphics and stored within each instance of the plugin, so all your adjustments are maintained as you switch between curves. They're also saved with your DAW project.

💡TIP: Route your kick drum track into Kickstart 2's sidechain input to have its waveform appear in the oscilloscope (in yellow) alongside your bass or other input signal (in white). This makes it easier to tweak the Slope to fit the kick, and works even if you're not using the Audio Trigger mode (which is when you would otherwise route the kick into the sidechain input).

Length

Four curve Lengths are available: **1/8**, **1/4**, **1/2** and **1/1**.

In the default Loop On mode (see below), use Length to set ducking to occur every eighth-note, quarter-note, half-note or bar. For classic 4/4 house ducking, for example, use the default 1/4 option; or for a half-time trap feel, go for 1/2 or 1/1.

When **Loop** is Off (see below), Length simply controls the total length of the sidechain ducking curve.

Trigger mode

Kickstart 2 gives you three ways to control when the sidechain ducking curve restarts:

- **Sync**: Kickstart 2 cycles continuously in sync with the host DAW, rhythmically ducking the input signal at a rate determined by the **Length** setting. This is the default mode, for when you need constant, repetitive ducking.

- **MIDI**: The sidechain ducking curve is triggered by incoming MIDI notes from a MIDI track in your DAW. Further settings are found in the **MIDI & Audio Trigger Options** screen. Please refer to our FAQ page for instructions on routing MIDI into Kickstart 2.

- **Audio**: Use the Audio triggering option when you want the ducking to precisely track the rhythm of the kick drum in your track – such as when the kick pattern is irregular, rather than four-to-the-floor, or features variations (fills, kick-free breaks, etc).
  With your kick drum track routed into Kickstart 2's sidechain input, the ducking curve is triggered every time the kick hits. Check out our guide, or see your DAW's manual for instructions on routing audio into Kickstart's sidechain input.

Note: To ensure accurate and click-free results, **Audio** triggering uses a small amount of latency (16ms). Latency can be reduced by 6ms by disabling **Anti-Click Smoothing**, which is also used for MIDI mode. **Sync** mode is completely latency-free. You may need to stop and restart playback in your DAW for any change in latency to register.

Note: Kickstart 2 runs at zero latency in **Sync** Mode. **MIDI** mode also runs at zero latency when **Anti-Click Smoothing** is off, or 6ms when it's on. **Audio** mode runs at 10ms latency when **Anti-Click Smoothing** is off, and 16ms when it's on.

💡TIP: Latency changes when you switch trigger mode. You may need to stop and restart playback in your DAW for this change to register.

💡 TIP: MIDI triggering is most helpful when you want to take full manual control of your ducking, while audio triggering is the fast way to achieve ducking based on a kick drum pattern you've already created. Both triggering modes can also save the day when the host DAW fails to compensate for latency effectively.

💡 TIP: MIDI trigger mode is also useful for circumventing latency issues in DAWs such as Ableton Live and Logic Pro.

💡TIP: While Audio triggering is fine-tuned to work well with kicks, you can try it with any other percussive material too, such as snares, hi-hats, percussion, synths, etc. For example, try chopping up a pad to the rhythm of your hats, or ducking a synth every time the snare plays.

Loop

When MIDI or Audio trigger mode is active, the **Loop** button ( ) appears. If you want every MIDI note or audio transient to duck the signal only once, turn Loop off (one-shot mode). If, on the other hand, you want the sidechain curve to loop continuously until the next trigger arrives, turn Loop on.

The **Loop** button is hidden when in **Sync** mode, since the LFO always loops in sync with the host DAW's clock.
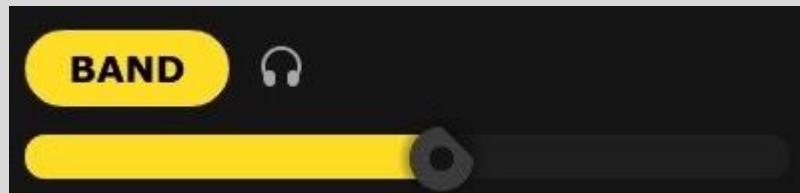
End marker

When **MIDI** or **Audio** triggering is active and **Loop** is off, you can adjust where the sidechain curve 'stops' by dragging the **End** marker left and right in the waveform display. The curve effectively freezes when it reaches the End marker, remaining at that value until it's triggered again.

Band split
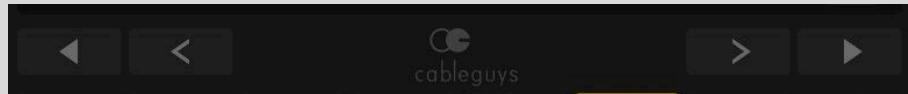
Using Kickstart 2's band split feature, you can duck only the low frequencies in a signal, leaving everything above a user-specified cutoff point unaffected. This is useful when you want to get the low end of a frequency-rich bassline out of the way of a kick drum without compromising its mid-range presence, for example, or duck just low toms in a kick-free drum loop.

Click **Band** to enable the band split, then adjust the slider to set the cutoff frequency, from 20Hz to 5.12kHz. Kickstart 2 will duck only the frequencies below this point. To hear only the processed portion of the signal, click the 🎧 button.

Shift

You can move the entire sidechain ducking curve in either direction using the four **Shift** buttons.

The two outer **Shift** buttons offset the waveform by 1/16 of the curve's **Length** with each click.

The two inner **Shift** buttons give fine adjustment, shifting the waveform at 16 times the resolution of the outer buttons.

Like wave slope offset, **Shift** is visualized in the **Sidechain Curve** buttons and stored for each waveform within each instance of the plugin.
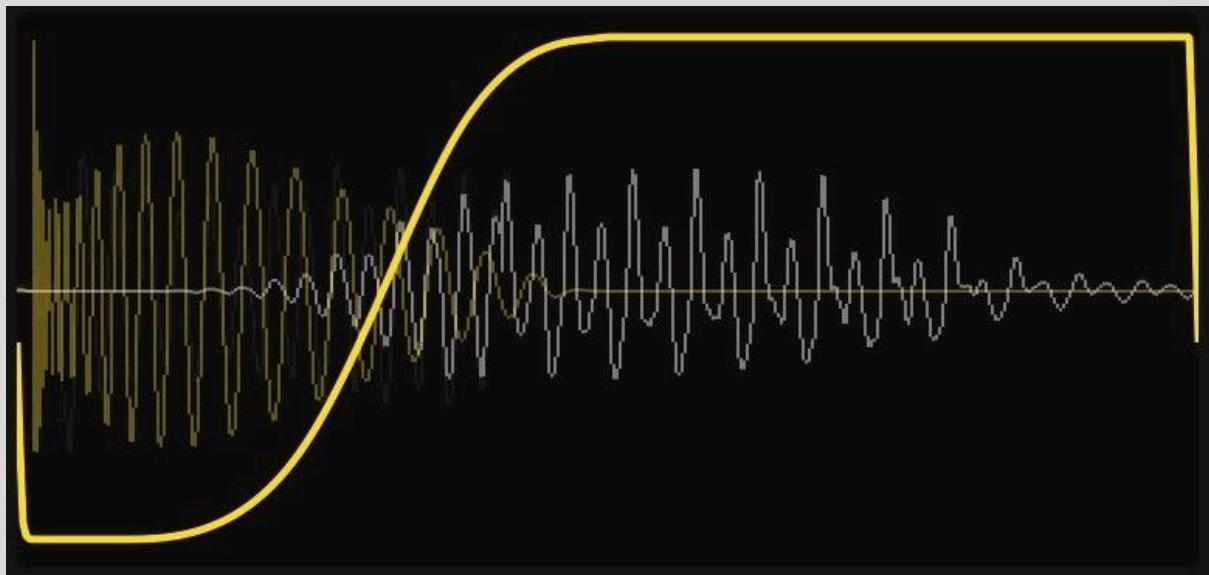
💡TIP: Shift is mainly useful with the **Sync** Trigger Mode, for adjusting the groove.

Reset curve

Set the current curve waveform back to its default Shift and Slope.

Oscilloscope and Kick View

The oscilloscope shows the ducked output signal with a real-time waveform, shown in white. This makes it easy to see the effect the ducking is having on your bassline.
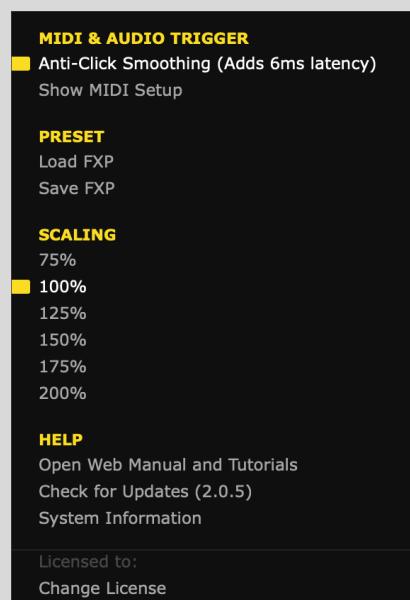
What if you want to see the kick drum too? Activate the Oscilloscope's **Kick View** by routing your kick drum track into Kickstart 2's sidechain input inside your DAW, using your DAW's sidechain routing system. Now the kick drum will be overlaid in yellow, making it easy to adjust the Curve and Slope to tightly lock the bass to it. This works with all Trigger Modes: Sync, MIDI and Audio.

Main Menu

The top right **Main Menu** (☰) houses various **Trigger**, **Scaling** and **Help** options.

MIDI & Audio Trigger

Anti-Click Smoothing: On by default, this alleviates any clicks that could arise when retriggering LFOs with MIDI or audio. Disabling this will reduce latency by 6ms, giving
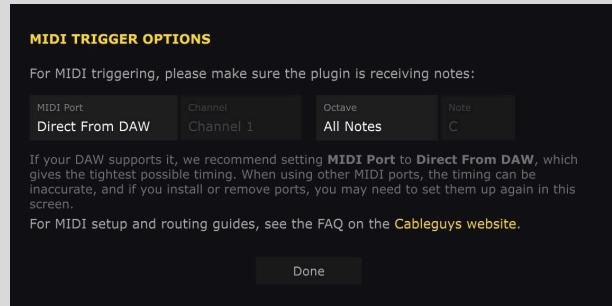
10ms latency for **Audio** mode, and no latency for **MIDI** mode.

Show MIDI Setup: Opens the **MIDI Trigger Options** screen, with these options:

- **MIDI Port**

  - **Direct From DAW**: This is the best option if supported by your DAW, as it gives the tightest possible timing.

  - **MIDI Devices**: If your DAW doesn't support the **Direct From DAW** option, assign a MIDI input port from those available to your system. The timing may not be as tight, though, and you'll need to return to this screen if ports are added or removed.

- **Channel:** Select 'All Channels', or any individual MIDI channel from 1-16 for input.

- **Octave** and **Note**: Select 'All Notes' in the **Octave** menu to trigger Kickstart 2 using any note. To restrict triggering to a single note, select it from the **Octave** and **Note** menus.

For instructions on setting your DAW up to send MIDI to Kickstart 2, please visit our [FAQ page](#).

Preset

Load FXP: Browse to and load a stored preset in FXP file format.

Save FXP: Save the current Kickstart setup to your hard drive as a preset in FXP file format, for storage and sharing.

Scaling

75% - 200%: Adapt Kickstart 2 to any size and resolution of display by scaling the GUI to a range of fixed sizes between 75% and 200% of the original.

Help

Open Web Manual and Tutorials: Open this manual and view Kickstart 2 tutorial videos.

Check for Updates: Make sure you're running the latest version of Kickstart 2.

System Information: Open a panel containing information on your computer, operating system, DAW and more. Use the Copy button to copy the contents to your pasteboard for emailing to our support team, should you run into any issues with Kickstart 2.

Change License: Switch your current Kickstart 2 license to a different one.

And Finally...

If you like what you hear from Kickstart, be sure to check out Kickstart's big brother **VolumeShaper**, which has powerful features including 3-way multiband, completely flexible curve design and a built-in console-style compressor. Find out more and try the free demo at **cableguys.com**.