Gain Control
Part 1

Tim Orr continues his occasional series of circuits, methods and explanations with a detailed look at how gain can be controlled by another electronic signal, be it squarewave, sinewave or voice signal. This leads to some interesting circuits — from ducks to filters!

THERE ARE MANY cases in signal processing where the control of the gain is necessary. Some common examples are automatic volume controls in cassette recorders and in the IF sections of radio receivers. Also in professional audio equipment there is a whole range of compressor, expander, limiter and noise gate devices which find great use in recording and broadcast studios. Maybe you have wondered how the volume of the music drops when the DJ starts to talk and then fades up again when he stops. This process known as voice over or "ducking", uses *voltage control of gain.*

Noise reduction systems such as dolby and dbx employ voltage controlled amplifiers. Synthesisers and sound processors obtain effects such as ring modulation, automatic panning, frequency shifting, dynamic filtering, tremolo and envelope shaping also by the use of this technique.

Gaining Gain

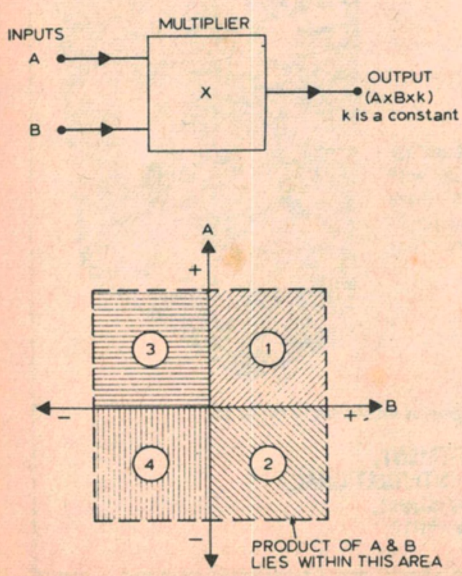
There is a wide variety of methods which can be used to obtain the gain control. This can be anything from constructing the variable gain element yourself from basic parts, to buying ICs or modules designed specifically to solve your particular problem. Generally the solution is some sort of compromise, because unfortunately the problem of making high performance controlled gain cells (multipliers), is rather difficult and therefore the ICs tend to be rather expensive.

However with a bit of care a cost effective solution can usually be produced.

A good example is the AGC in a transistor radio. The transistors in the IF section have an h_{fe} that varies widely with collector current. Thus, by sticking three transistors in series it is possible to vary their overall gain by about 40 dB, (x 100), merely by controlling their collector currents. The AGC stops the audio output of the radio from varying as the radio reception conditions alter.

Electronic Multipliers

When it is required to control the level of one signal with that of another, an electronic multiplier is used. This process is analogous to arithmetic multiplication. If input A is positive, fig. 1, and input B is positive, then the product (the output), will also be positive. If A goes negative then



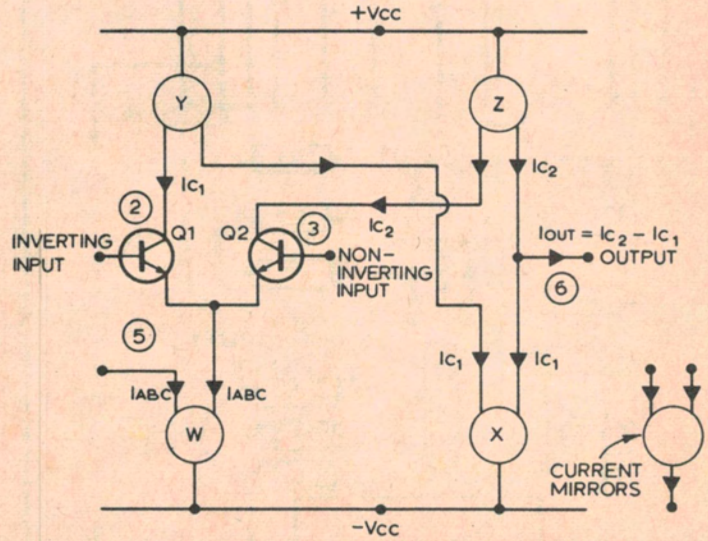


Fig. 1, left: the principle behind electronic multipliers. The graph shows the possible outputs for a variety of combinations of input polarities.
Fig. 2, above: internal workings of a CA3080, an Operational Tranconductance Amplifier.

the product will be negative. If both A and B are negative then the product will be positive thus preserving the arithmetic rules.

If A and B are limited to be only one sign each then the multiplier is known as a one quadrant multiplier. This is the product can only be in one quadrant. If A can be both +ve and -ve, and B only of one sign then the multiplier is known as a two quadrant multiplier. This is what is called an amplitude modulator. The audio signal which is bipolar is A and the control voltage is B.

If A and B can be both +ve and -ve, the product can lie anywhere in the four quadrants and hence the multiplier is known as a four quadrant multiplier. This type of device is found in frequency shifters and ring modulators.

CA3080 – An OTA!

The CA3080 is a two quadrant multiplier, or to give it its full title, it is an Operational Transconductance Amplifier. It has a differential input and a single quadrant input known as I_{ABC}, (amplifier bias current), fig. 2. The differential transistor pair is used to steer the I_{ABC} current between the two transistors Q2. There is a region where the input differential voltage is linearly proportional to the percentage of current steered between the two transistors. This voltage region is fairly small, being about 20 mV, but using the CA3080 in this area then a reasonably linear 2 quadrant multiplier can be obtained.

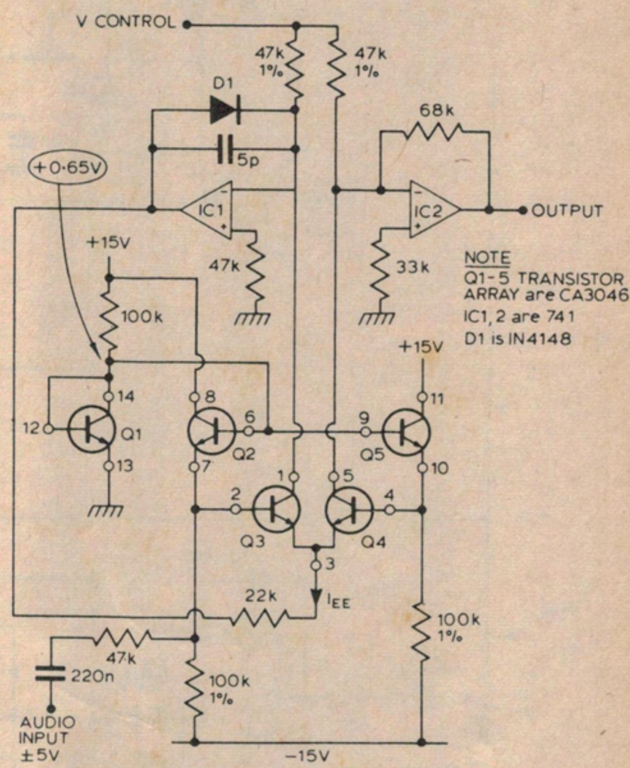
What has happened is that the I_{ABC} current has been multiplied by the input voltage. The produce is the difference between the two collector currents. This difference is extracted by the use of mirrors, current mirrors that is. The current mirrors can be attached to either the +ve or the -ve supply rail.

A current mirror has two input terminals, whatever current flows into one flows into the other – hence the term 'current mirror'.

What we want to do is take the difference between the collector currents of Q1 and Q2. I_{C1} is reflected from mirror Y and then from mirror X and then appears at the output. I_{C2} is reflected from mirror Z and then appears at the output. The two currents are subtracted from each other and the output current is thus (I_{C2} – I_{C1}), which is the product of $I_{ABC} \times V_m \times K$, where K is a constant. Note that the I_{ABC} current is also reflected from a current mirror on the negative rail.

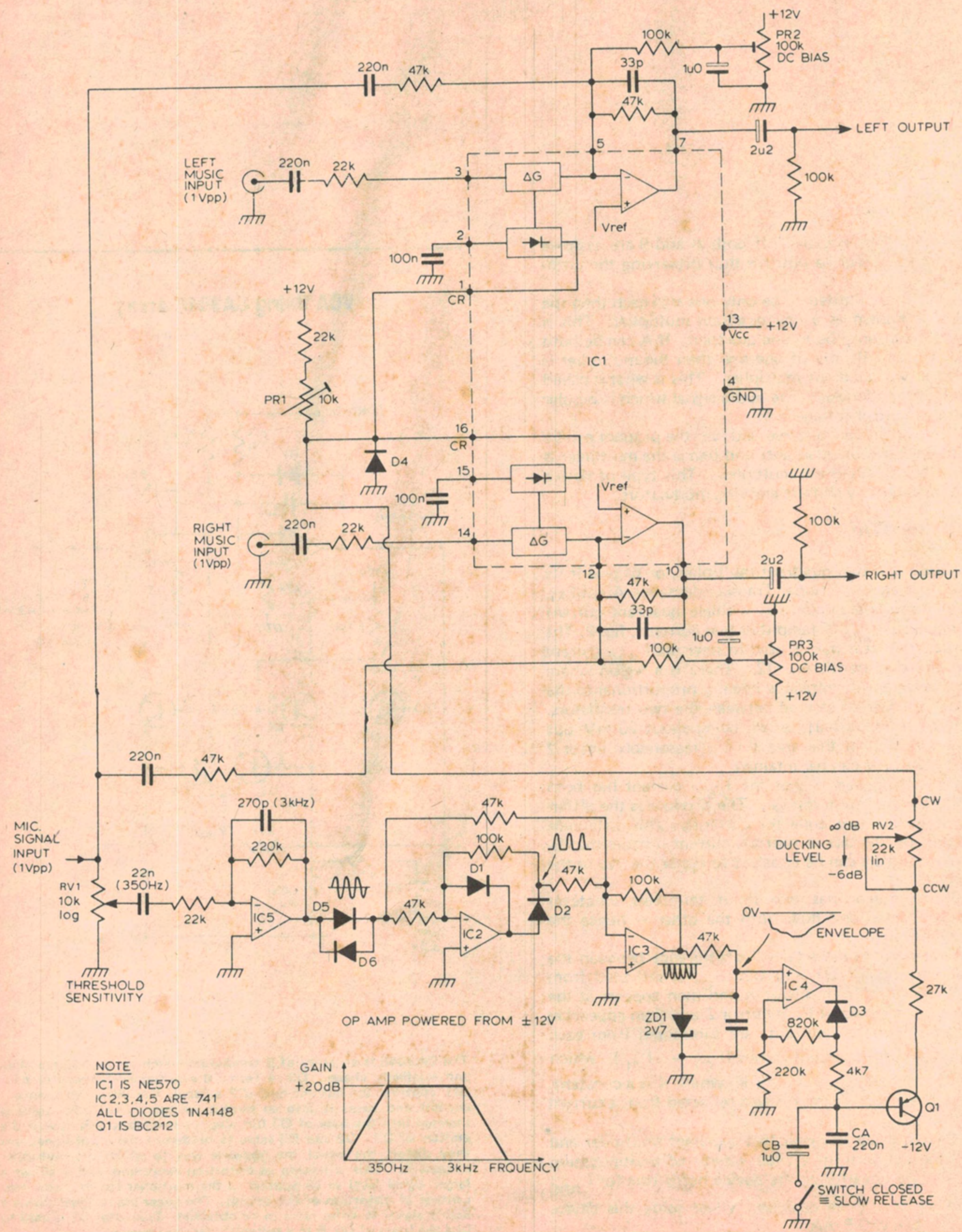
The CA3080 is a low cost two quadrant multiplier and can be used to perform a wide variety of multiplication functions. The linearity of the device holds true for I_{ABC} variations of over three decades. When using this device keep I_{ABC} below 0.5 mA.

VCA Using CA3046 Array



The CA3046 is an array of 5 transistors which are all well matched and relatively cheap. Q3, 4 forms the differential transistor pair, IC1 controls the current and IC2 extracts the differential output current and turns it into an output voltage. The audio input is inserted into the base of Q3 but also connected to this node is the emitter of Q2. Q2 and Q5 serve to predistort the input signal, but they distort the signal the opposite way to which the multiplier distorts it. This is known as distortion cancelling, and it allows a larger signal level to be applied to the multiplier for the same percentage of distortion at the output. The larger input signal allows a higher signal to noise ratio to be obtained. Transistor Q1 is used to bias the bases of Q2, 5 to a suitable operating region.

Stereo Voice Over (Ducking) Circuit for Disco Unit



The circuit operation is as follows. The microphone signal comes via VR1. This pot sets the sensitivity of the circuit to the microphone signal. If it is too sensitive the unit will be 'ducking' every time the DJ breathes. IC5 is an amplifier and filter. The filter has been specifically tailored to fit the characteristics of speech, thus making the ducking unit less sensitive to spurious noise. IC2, 3 forms a precision full wave rectifier, the output of which is low pass filtered and then fed to IC4. This wave form is the envelope of the microphone input signal.

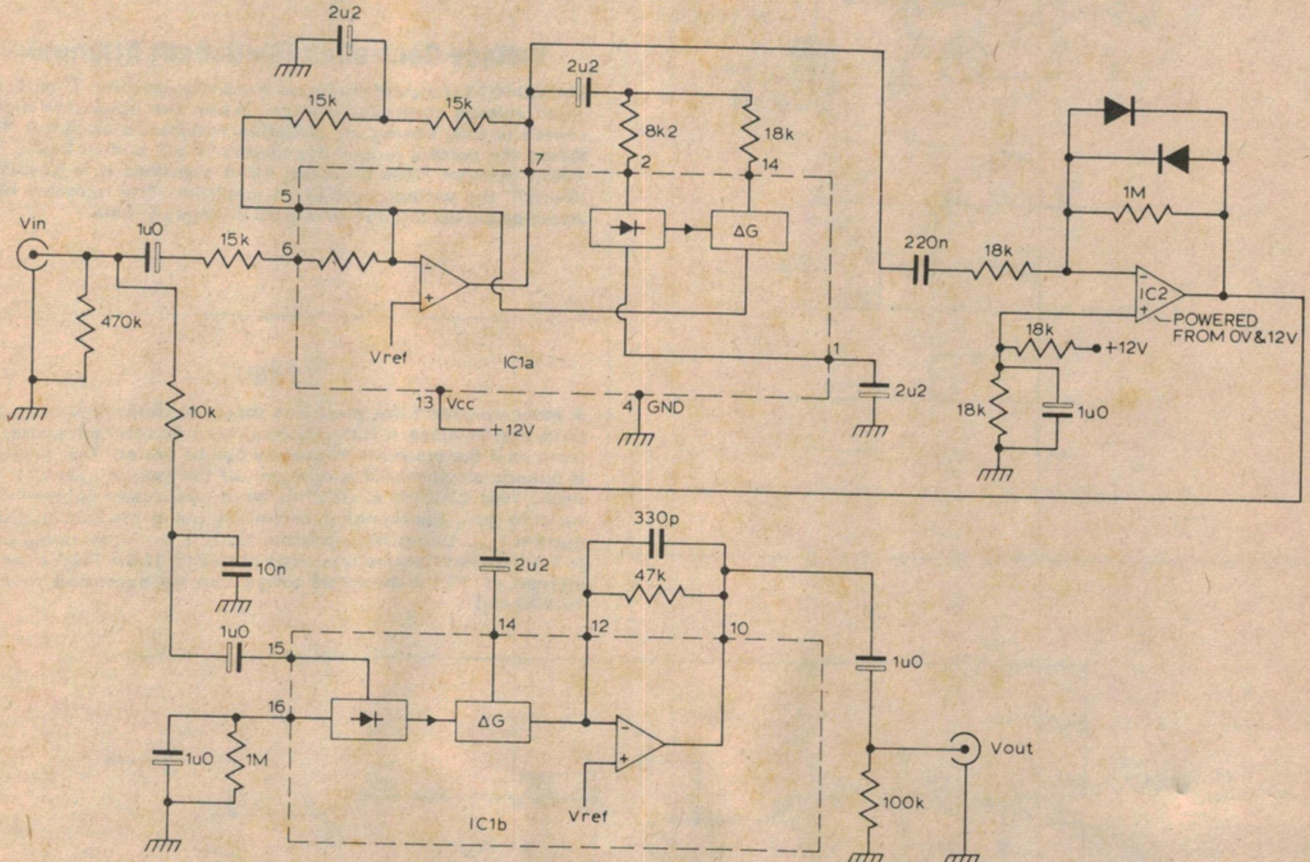
IC4 is a peak, negative going, voltage detector with a gain of x 5. When the DJ begins to speak, IC4 goes negative and in doing so pulls the base of G 1 negative. When the DJ stops speaking the base of G 1 rises back towards 0 V with a time constant determined by CA or CA + CB.

This is the release time and it controls the speed with which the faded down music comes back to full volume. G 1 is an emitter follower and is job is to rob current from the gain cells in the NE570.

This current sets the volume of the two music channels. When the base of G 1 is pulled down to the negative rail, the amount of robbed current is maximum, and when no current flows into pins 1 and 16 of the NE570 and all of it flows into g 1, then both nusic channels are turned off.

To set up PR1, put a large signal into the microphone channel, set RV2 so that it is a short circuit and then adjust PR1 so that the two music channels just close off. PR2 and PR3 should be adjusted so that pins 7 and 10 Of the NE570 are both +6 V.

Clever Fuzz Box



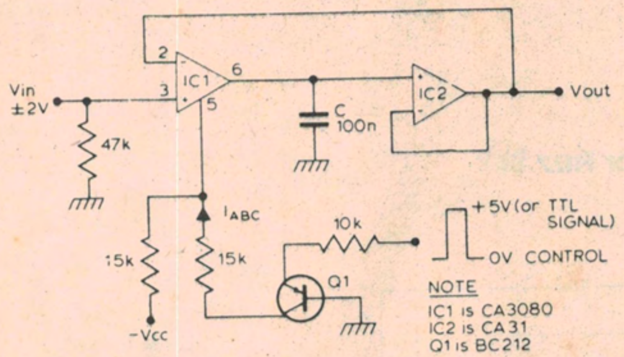
Fuzz boxes are used by guitarists to produce harmonic distortion and sustain. If you want to produce only the distortion, but to retain the original envelope of the signal then this is the circuit for you.

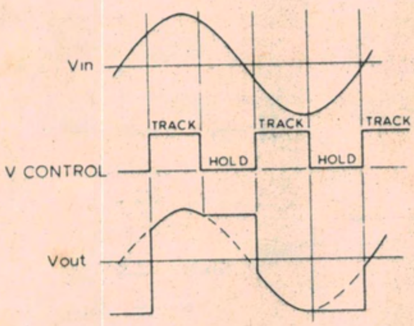
IC1 is a 2:1 compressor as described previosuly. This produces a relatively high level signal which then drives IC2, which is a x 50 amplifier with diode clamping. IC2 produces the distorted (fuzz) found. This is then fed into the IC3 gain cell, the output of which drives the op amp. This gain cell is driven by the rectified original signal (low pass filtered at 1k5 Hz), so that the distorted sound is given the envelope characteristics of the original sound.

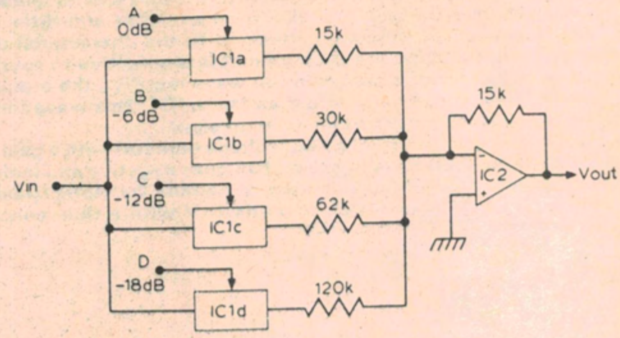
If a fuzz sustain sound is required rather than a dynamic fuzz then IC3 could be modified (by the inclusion of a clamped high gain amplifier driving pin 15) so that it acts as a low level expander. This will squelch the noise at the end of the fuzz period.

Track and Hold

In this example the CA3080 is used as a current controlled switch. When the control voltage is high, I_{ABC} is maximum, (0.44 mA) and the OTA gain is maximum. The voltage at pin 2 of IC1 adjusts itself so that it is the same as that on pin 3, this being due to the 100 per cent feedback via the high input impedance voltage follower IC2. When the control voltage is OV, I_{ABC} is zero and hence the gain of the OTA is zero. Therefore no current comes out of its output and so the voltage at the output of IC2 remains frozen (Hold mode). The maximum differential input voltage is 5 V and this must not be exceeded. The capacitor C should be selected to suit the speed of the operation.







0≡ -6V
1 ≡ +6V

A	B	C	D	GAIN
1	0	0	0	0dB
0	1	0	0	-6dB
0	0	1	0	-12dB
0	0	0	1	-18dB

POWERED BY ±6V

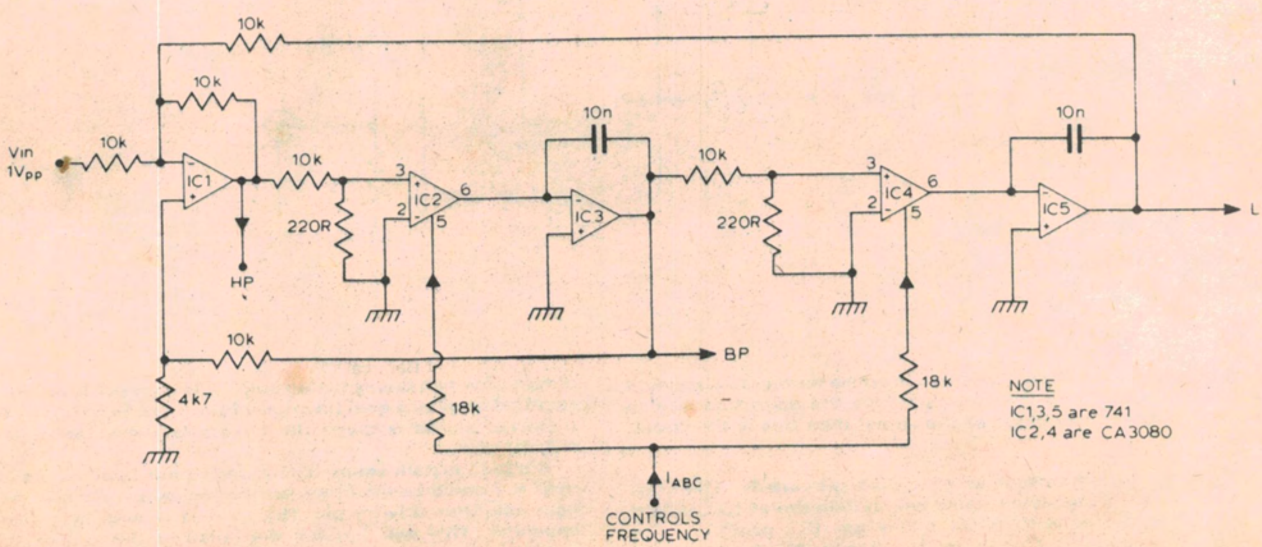
NOTE
IC1 is 4016
IC2 is 741

Voltaqe Controlled (Switched) Attenuator

The CD4016 is a quad analogue transmission gate. That is, it is a quad voltage controlled switch. When the control is high the switch is ON, having an effective resistance of about 400R. When the control is low the switch is off and ot looks like a 100M resistor. Thus by using 4016 switches it is possible to 'Switch' the voltage gain of an amplifier. The resistors in this example are selected to give 6 dB changes in gain.

Filter

A state variable filter produces three outputs: highpass, bandpass, and lowpass. It is thus a very versatile filter structure, even more so if the resonant frequency can be varied. This frequency is linearly proportional to the gain of the two integrators in the filter. Two CA3080's, (IC2, 4) have been used to provide the variable gain, the resonant frequency being proportional to the current I_{ABC}. Using 741 op amps for IC3 a control range of 100 to 1, (resonant frequency) can be obtained. If CA3140's are used instead of 741's then this range can be extended to nearly 10,000 to 1.



Gain Control
Part 2

To conclude his survey of electronic gain control methods. Tim Orr presents us with more circuits which vary from a light bulb compressor to a markspace modulated universal filter unit, and a noise gate/expander.

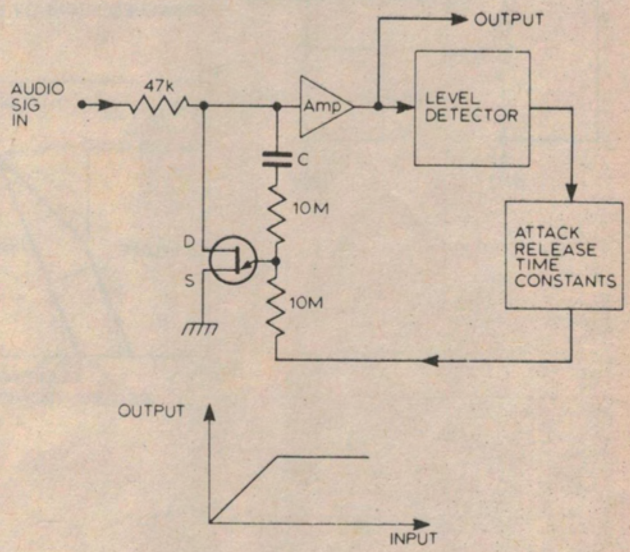
Basic Limiter Circuit

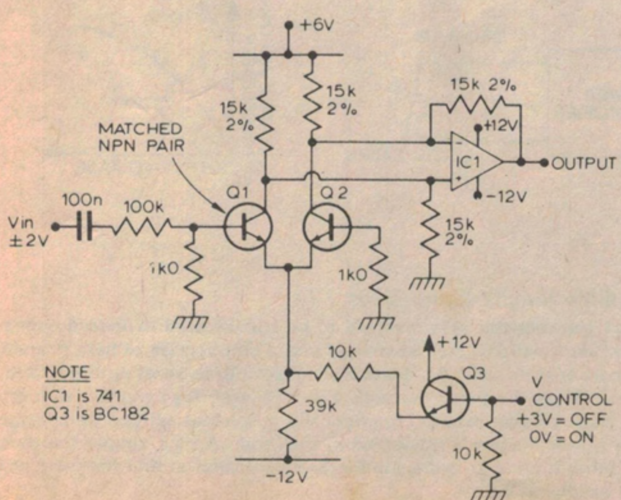
Most professional limiter circuits use a FET as the variable gain element. Relatively low distortion with a reasonable signal to noise ratio can be obtained. A basic limiter circuit is shown this being no different to previous circuits except for the variable gain element.

When a relatively small voltage (20 mV) is applied to the drain source of a FET, it acts like a fairly linear resistor. As the gate source voltage is varied, this resistor (RDS) also varies.

In fact the channel resistance RDS is inversely proportional to gate source voltage V_{GS}. When V_{GS} is OV, then RDS is at its generally minimum resistance (R_{ON}) which can be as low as 5R, but it is generally more like 100R. When V_{GS} exceeds the pinch off voltage (Vp or V_{GS} off) the channel resistance goes up to several hundred megohms. So a junction FET can be used as a voltage controlled resistor, except that R_{ON} and V_{GS} (OFF) tend to vary widely from device to device. However with a bit of perseverance suitable devices can be selected and made to work.

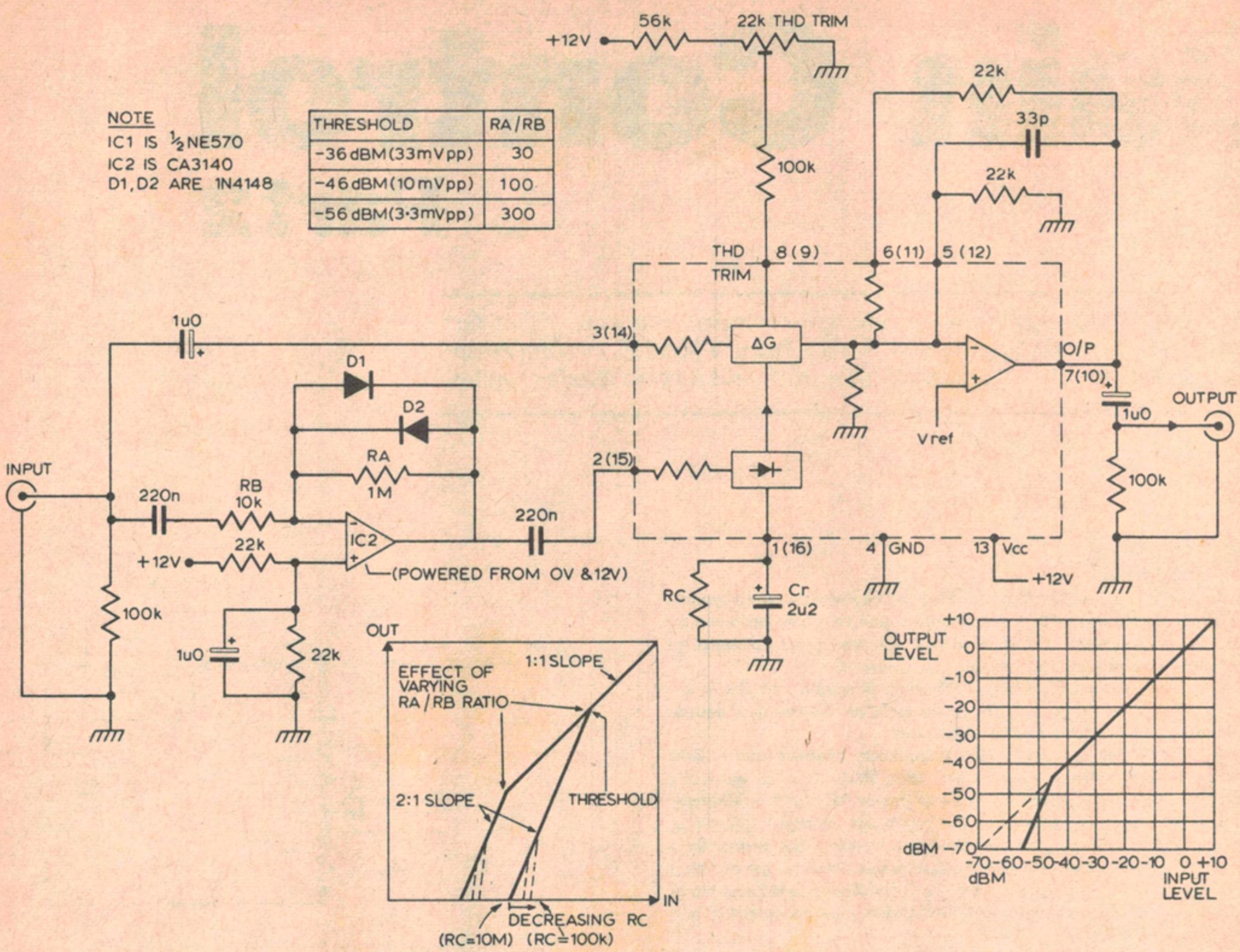
One circuit trick that greatly reduces distortion is shown here. Half of the audio signal at the drain of the FET is presented to the gate. This is superimposed on top of the control voltage and produces a distortion cancelling effect. Distortion levels below 0.1% can be achieved using this technique.





Transistor VCA

A circuit similar in operation to a CA3080 can be constructed with a matched pair of transistors and an op amp. Transistors Q1, 2 form a differential transistor pair which is used to steer whatever current is available between the two collectors, just as in the CA3080. The difference between the collector currents is equal to the product of the input voltage times the current I_{EE} times a constant. This difference is extracted by the differential amplifier IC1. The current I_{EE} is controlled by Q3. As the control voltage goes positive, Q3 robs most of the current flowing down the 39k resistor, and hence I_{EE} and the output of IC1 decrease.



THRESHOLD	RA/RB
-36 dBM(33mVpp)	30
-46 dBM(10mVpp)	100
-56 dBM(3·3mVpp)	300

Two Channel Low Level Expander/Noise Gate

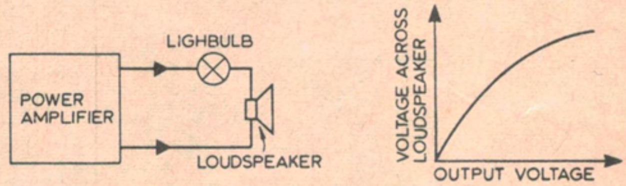
It is often required that a rather noisy signal be cleaned up a bit. This is not possible to do continuously, but it is possible to clean up noise in what was initially the gaps. The results of this cleaning up process can quite often be heard when telephone conversations from "foreign correspondents" are broadcast.

By turning down the signal level in the gaps, (by performing a low level expansion) the perceived sound quality improves dramatically.

The circuit performs just such an expansion. The inputs signal passes through the variable gain cell and then appears at the op amp output. The gain of the gain cell is controlled by the signal coming from IC2. This is a high gain amplifier with diode clamping, so that the output swing is limited to about 1VO ptp. Therefore for input signals of 10 mV pp to 10 V pp, the output of IC2 remains at about 1 VO ptp to 1V2 ptp.

So, for this range of input voltages the gain of the gain cell remains roughly static. Now when the input level drops below 10 mV, the output of IC2 will start to fall and so will the gain of the gain cell. This produces a 2:1 downwards expansion curve, which means that the output then gets quieter at a rate faster than the input. To accentuate this effect, a bleed resistor can be placed in parallel with Cr.

The resistor robs some of the current that would have otherwise gone to the gain cell and causes the input/output curve to roll off much more rapidly at low signal levels. Also, by varying the resistor ratio of RZ/RB, the expansion threshold level can be altered.

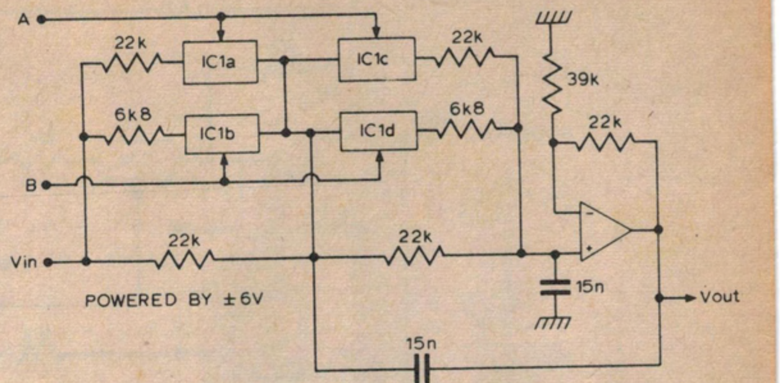


Incredibly Simple Compressor

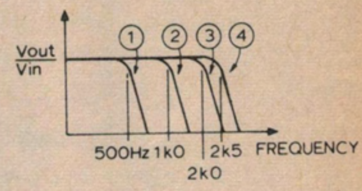
Not all gain control systems need to be complicated or indeed active. One product which I saw advertised was a compressor to help prevent loudspeaker/overloads. All it was was a lightbulb in series with the loudspeaker. When the power exceeds a certain level, the lamp will turn on, glow, its resistance increase dramatically and hence a bigger percentage of the power output is dissipated in the lamp. A nice, simple solution, but I think it would require some experimentation to find the right sort of car headlamp bulb!

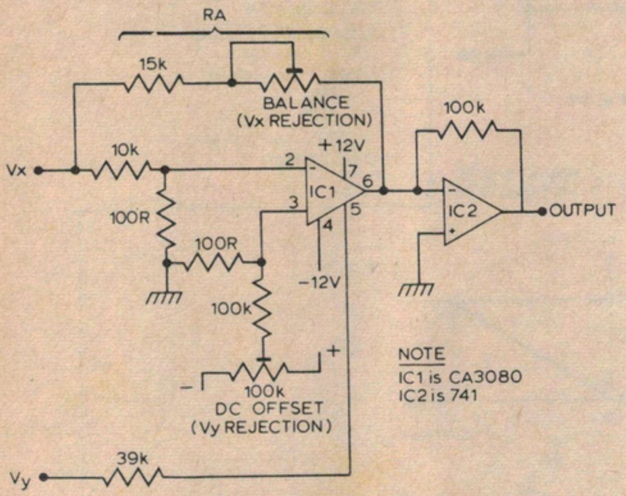
Switched Frequency Low Pass Filter

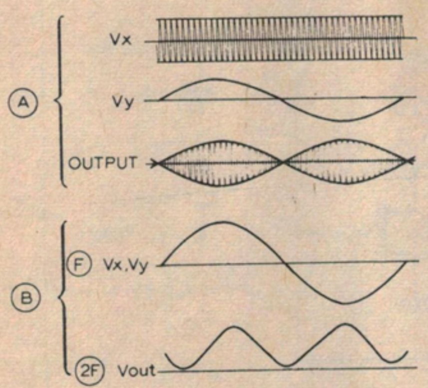
In this example the effective resistance is switched by using 4016 gates. The filter is a lowpass Butterworth and by turning gates A or B ON or OFF the cut off frequency can be altered. This allows the filter control to be physically remote or even to be computer controlled. Mark Space modulation of A and B would enable continuous control over the cut off frequency.



	①	②	③	④
A	OFF	ON	OFF	ON
B	OFF	OFF	ON	ON
Fc	500Hz	1kHz	2kHz	2·5kHz







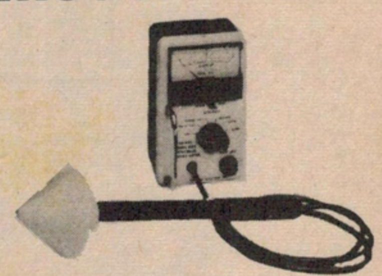
Four Quadrant Multiplication

By using a few circuit tricks, the CA3080 can be made to perform 4 quadrant multiplication. In fact the CA3080 performs 2 quadrant multiplication and the trick is to move the axis on the multiplying graph. If we ignore the RA resistor chain then we have a 2 quadrant multiplier circuit similar to that shown previously. Imagine that V_x is a 1kHz sine wave. 1 Vptp and V_y is a 0V. The output of IC2 is a sine wave of fixed amplitude. Now if we connect RA , and adjust the balance control, it will be possible to cancel out the output, because the signal coming from IC1 is out of phase with that from the RA resistor chain. So with V_y set at 0 V there is no output for IC2. If V_y goes + ve, the output of IC1 will become greater than the current via the RA chain and the output if IC2 will grow.

If V_y goes–ve the current through the RA chain will exceed that from IC1 and the output of IC2 will grow, the phase being opposite to that when V_y was a sinewave from an oscillator, then this circuit could be used to generate ring modulation effects.

When V_x is set at OV there may be some V_y breakthrough and this can be minimised by adjusting the V_y rejection preset.

Microwave Survey Meter Model HI 1501



The HI 1501 is a rugged, compact, portable instrument and is virtually immune to failure caused by excessive fields or physical abuse. It consists of a lightweight instrument package connected to a unique detection probe by a shielded cable.

For additional information call or write:

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276 Highett Rd, Highett, Vic.
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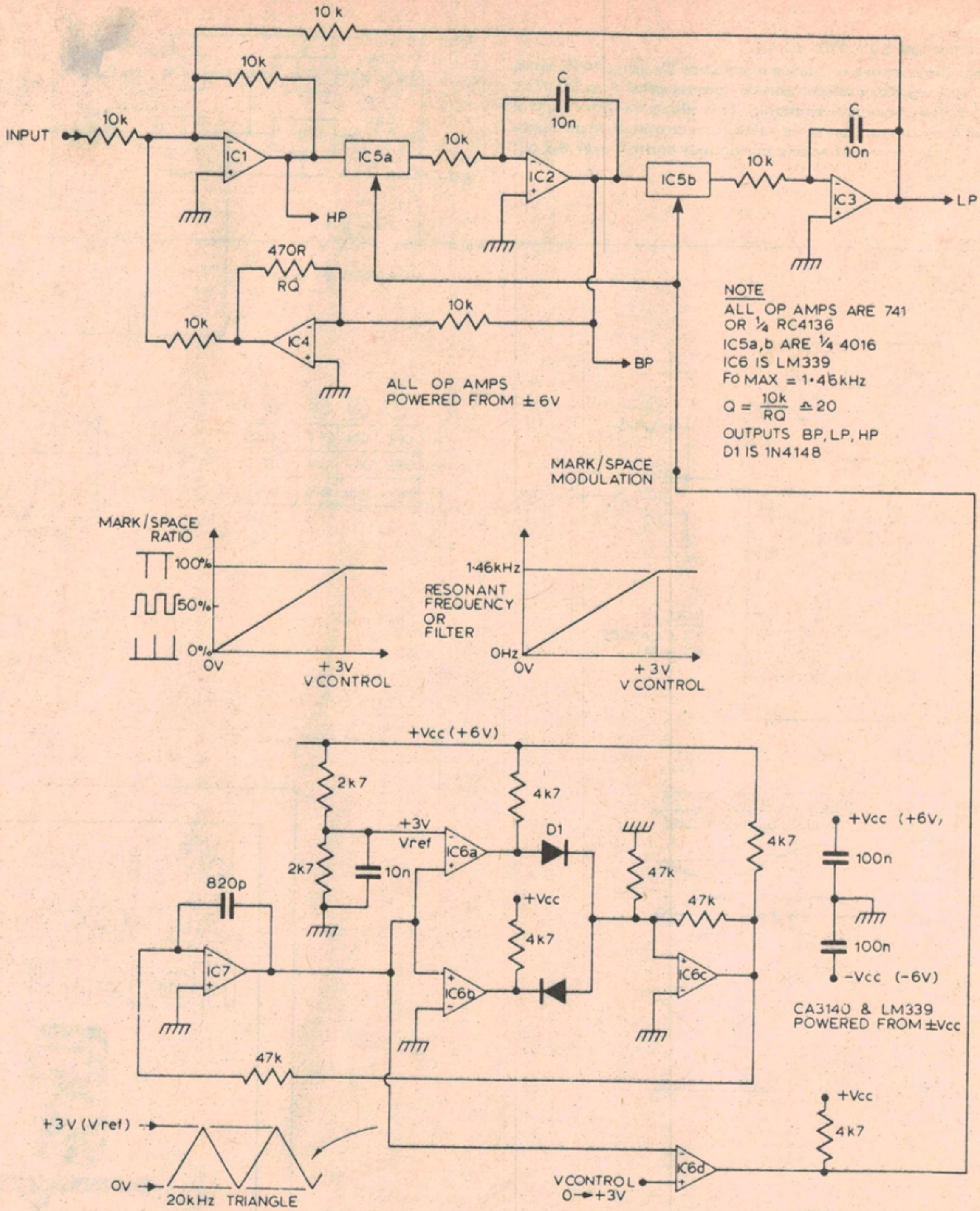

Markspace Modulated Universal Filter

It is possible to change the gain of an amplifier by effectively altering the input resistor. This can be done by markspace modulating a voltage controlled switch in series with the resistor.

When the markspace ratio is low, the switch is 'off' most of the time and the effective resistance is large. When the markspace ratio is high the switch is 'on' most of the time and the effective resistance approaches that of the series resistor.

Having generated a markspace control waveform, it is possible to gang together literally hundreds of voltage controlled switches. This allows the control of large numbers of variables simultaneously.

The circuit consists of a modulated universal filter (ICs 1 to 5) and a markspace generator (ICs 6 and 7).

ICs 7 and 6a to 6c form a triangle/square wave oscillator. IC7 is the integrator whose output ramps up and down between 0V and +3V. IC6a and 6b are fast comparators which detect the end of the inegrator travel and switch the schmitt trigger IC6c, which in turn controls the integrator. The output frequency of the oscillator is about 20 kHz.

It is important that the frequency of the oscillator be relatively high. As a rule of thumb it should be 2½ times the highest frequency components of the signal you wish to process. The triangle output is fed into IC6d's inverting input, the control voltage being fed into the non-inverting one. The output of IC6d is the markspace modulation which is used to drive the switches IC5a and b. The filter's resonant frequency is directly proportional to the markspace ratio of the signal that drives the switches and thus is proportional to the control voltage.