



## Rocktron Utopia G100 £239

Rack unit expert switches its expertise to affordable multi-FX by Simon Bradley

### The rivals

|               |      |
|---------------|------|
| Korg AX3000G  | £249 |
| BOSS ME-50    | £229 |
| DigiTech GNX1 | £199 |

The flagship of the AX ranges features 72 REMS-powered amp, cab and effects sims and models in one sturdy box. The internal memory stores 32 factory presets plus space for a further 96 user sounds. Designed to work in tandem with your amp sounds, the extremely rugged ME-50 allows you to either switch various effects on and off as you would a number of stompboxes or simply a number of the 30 presets. COSM technology makes this a toneful unit and it's dead easy to use too. Amongst the GNX1's highlights is the Learn-A-Lick feature, invaluable or budding players, and the GeNetEx technology that allows the user to create so-called Hypermodels. Great value.

Rocktron has long been at the forefront of rack and associated technologies and its patented Hush noise reduction system, introduced way back in 1983, remains the industry standard method of removing unwanted hiss and spit from your carefully crafted tones.

The Utopia sees Rocktron applying these standards to a unit towards the lower end of the market and the company forgoes the current trend by including no specific models of classic amps, effects and the like in favour of providing simply a wide range of tones with as expansive a field of use as possible.

The basis of any tone resides within one of four preamp types that offer their own specific levels of gain and character. In addition there are six basic configurations that you can choose depending on which type of effects you want and how you need them combined.

With 64 user patches and 64 factory presets there's plenty of room to work in, and by using the selection of controls in the correct order it's quick



Impressive whammy and wah effects are accessed via the foot controller

and easy to begin playing with your tones. Use the function knob to pick an action, then further edit proceedings via the parameter select and parameter adjust controls, not forgetting to press the store button.

**The vast majority of the presets are a lesson in how to produce digitally based guitar tones**



## This has to be one of the best-sounding multi-effects units of this price and ilk we've come across, but the conundrum is that it's also one of the least convenient to use

Around the back, alongside a mono input and stereo outs, is an auxiliary input designed specifically for inserting mp3 or CD players, plus a wonderful-sounding headphone jack too. Power comes from an included nine-volt supply and hopefully, once these units hit the stores in Blighty, they'll be equipped with a UK three-pin plug rather than a two-pronged US unit.

When compared to today's choice of similar units, all bristling with lights and footpedals, the three-button design of the Utopia will come as a surprise. Sadly, we feel that its method of recalling and switching between patches is somewhat old-fashioned and bears a resemblance to, for example, the long-gone Yamaha effects units of yore: remember the good old SPX90?

So, instead of the 128 available patches being arranged in a number of banks, they are sorted into one long chain and you can only access them by manually pressing on the up and down buttons until you find what you're after. This laborious infrastructure is thankfully counteracted by the fact that you can move your tones around into whatever order you require, but then you have to also press the recall button to actually call the patch up. In the heat of the moment, that's a faff.

We feel that convenience of use has been sacrificed somewhat here. And when you discover there's not even a tuner included with this unit, you begin to wonder why anyone would be attracted to the Utopia considering the not inconsiderable competition it faces at this price.

**SOUNDS:** The answer is how it sounds, and the vast majority of the preset tones on offer here are a lesson in how to produce digitally based guitar tones. As part of the process the Utopia is just as happy with recording needs as it would be in the live arena and, thanks to such features as the ability to move a virtual mic around a virtual speaker to tune things to just the right degree, the tone to tape/desktop will blow you away.

It's the high-gain sounds that are the most satisfying: both the mega and British preamp options offer organic levels of depth and drive that are arguably the best we've heard from any similarly-priced unit.

The clean sounds are pretty special too and you can use the exhaustive stereo imaging options to pan delays and modulations exactly where you need in the stereo picture, thus giving huge breadth to your tones.

There are decent wah and whammy effects that are accessed via the expression pedal and you can also program it as a traditional volume pedal too. Mind you, if you set the volume pedal to around half (as a real-time level regulator), silence unit via the central mute button and then 'unmute' it, the sound comes back at full volume, giving both you and your prospective audience an aural shock. We found we really did miss a standalone master volume pot too.

### Verdict

This has to be one of the best-sounding multi-effects units of this price and ilk



64 user patches and 64 presets are available but they aren't arranged in banks

| ROCKTRON UTOPIA G100 | TEST RESULTS |
|----------------------|--------------|
| Build quality        | ★★★★★        |
| Features             | ★★★★★        |
| Sound                | ★★★★★        |
| Value for money      | ★★★★★        |

■ **WE LIKED** Incredible tone and impressive list of features

■ **WE DISLIKED** Lack of a master volume control and tuner; an inconvenient switching system

we've come across, but the conundrum is that it's also one of the least convenient to use. Having patches arranged in a chain rather than in a series of banks ensures that flicking between them is a real chore. Also, if you neglect – as we did many a time – to press the recall button, you may not even obtain the sound you were expecting: that can be embarrassing.

With all this in mind, we'd suggest that, for recording, the Utopia would indeed live up to its name, especially if you just want a selection of great tones without any associated faffing. For everyone else, we suggest sitting with a unit for quite some time before making the leap. **G**

### Rocktron Utopia G100

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

### ROCKTRON UTOPIA G100

PRICE: £239.95

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Programmable digital multi-FX with on-board foot-controller

FEATURES: Four preamp types, Hush noise reduction, speaker simulation, Variac tube sag emulation, six different effects configurations

EFFECTS: Full bandwidth effects including wah, phaser, compressor, chorus, flanger, pitch shift, tremolo, delay and reverb

PATCHES: 128 (64 user, 64 factory)

MIDI: No

DISPLAY: Cool Blue LCD

CONNECTIONS: Input, stereo outputs, aux input, headphones input

POWER: Nine-volt supply included

EXT CONTROLLERS: n/a

OPTIONS: The G100 is Rocktron's only floor pedal multi-FX although other stompboxes, racks and amps are available (£POA)

FCN

01892 603730

www.rocktron.com