

DANELECTRO COOL CAT V2 PEDALS £49.99-£54.99
EFFECTS



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Danelectro Cool Cat V2 pedals £44.99-£54.99

At prices this low, surely these Danelectro pedals can't be serious tone machines... or can they? **by Adrian Clark**

Although previously best known for its quirky guitars, Danelectro waded bravely into a then conservative stompbox world in the 1990s. Taking on the likes of BOSS and DOD, its budget range included plenty of original ideas and some very impressive products. It now has several stompbox ranges, from the unfeasibly cheap FAB range, all the way up to the high-end Reel Echo and Spring King pedals. Although the Cool Cat range is the priciest of the lot, they're still inexpensive and three new models have been given version updates.

All three follow the same 'future retro' design scheme we've seen in other Dano boxes. Despite the low prices, the Cool Cats are housed in metal cases, and the large footswitch seems solid and tough, working with a satisfying mechanical click. The connections and controls are all situated on the rear edge, which looks cool, but unfortunately makes the control knobs rather fiddly. The battery is situated behind a hinged cover, although you can

also power the pedals with a nine-volt DC adaptor. Most importantly, the LED is blue. Very classy!

Transparent Overdrive CTO-2

Most overdrives have some affect on your tone, often reducing bass frequencies and focusing the mid-range, which can be useful for solos. But if you're happy with your basic tone and just need more of it, those pedals can be a pain. That's when you need something like this... a Transparent Overdrive.

Although Cool Cats seem to have three controls, a few, such as this, have dual-concentric bass and treble controls. As we mentioned, the combination of small knobs and restricted space means that Cool Cats are a bit fiddly at the best of times, so you do need a bit of patience with the dual controls. The

other two controls are standard: gain and volume.

All the units have surprises in the battery compartment for tone geeks. The CTO-2 has four DIP switches for fine-tuning the overdrive character. The first three are for adjusting the headroom, resulting in a more compressed sound, while the fourth is a 6dB gain boost, meaning that there's a total of 12dB available.

Sounds

We were initially sceptical of the chances of finding a truly transparent overdrive pedal for 50 quid. However, it turns out that the CTO-2 lives up to its name. Leaving the interior DIP switches untouched and setting all the main controls at 50 per cent, the pedal sounded exactly like our raw amp tone, but with an extra kick.

At low gain settings, you've got a great clean boost, and

The rivals

As we've said, transparent overdrive pedals tend to be pricey and one of the finest alternatives to the CTO-2 would be the **Xotic RC Booster** (£200). It also reminded us of another great overdrive, the **Keeley Mod+** (£179) version of the **Ibanez TS-808**. If you fear for your bank account, there are plenty of low budget overdrives, such as the **BOSS SD-1** (£45) or the **Behringer TO-800** (£46). These have a more mid-centred tone, similar to Danelectro's CO-2. For fuzz, there's **Behringer's UZ400** (£34), or if you have a bit more cash to spend, **MI Audio's GI Fuzz** (£99) is a very impressive unit.

although the tone controls are quite subtle (appropriately so), there's enough scope to add more bite or more overall body for solos or heavier chord parts. Boosting the gain control, the CTO-2 has enough gain for most purposes; if you want a really singing solo tone, you'll probably need to have a bit of grit in your basic amp sound.

Those DIP switches produce very subtle effects, but they're a welcome addition. The extra

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6dB allows for much more contrast in gain between dry and wet amp sounds, although higher gain settings are less crisp, becoming compressed and a little bit 'squishy'.

Drive CO-2

The simplest of the trio, the CO-2 has a single tone control, although once again there are some pleasant surprises inside the battery compartment. A trim pot adjusts the input sensitivity, while a DIP switch toggles the lo-fi mode.

Sounds

When we unwrapped the pedal, the lo-fi switch was off and the input sensitivity control was at its minimum setting, so we started as before, with the main controls at 50 per cent. The CO-2 doesn't claim to be transparent, producing a biting overdrive with hints of Tube Screamer mid-range, but with better low-end response than the classic Ibanez pedal. The tone control is very subtle, so you can't make any radical tonal alterations, but there's enough range to remove a little harshness, especially on single-coil pickups.

The overdrive character is totally different from that of the CTO-2. It's much more biting and aggressive at all settings, and higher settings result in much more of that compressed sponginess that you get with vintage fuzz and drive pedals. Using the volume and drive controls together there's plenty of boost available, and of course there's even more to be had if you boost the input sensitivity control in the battery compartment. Bear in mind that you'll lose a lot of headroom by doing that – the spongy old-school fuzz sound happens much sooner.

Speaking of old-school fuzz, the lo-fi switch is interesting. As far as we can tell, it cuts both high and low frequencies for a kind of 'AM radio' effect. With moderate distortion, you can get a pretty impressive approximation of the old 1960s Tonebender pedal – think Jeff Beck and Jimmy Page in their Yardbirds days.

Fuzz CF-2

Finally, here's Danelectro's take on some classic fuzz tones.

Along with its standard fuzz and volume controls, the CF-2 has dual-concentric EQ controls, as per the Transparent Overdrive. In the battery compartment, there's an input sensitivity knob and three DIP switches for adding different LEDs to the circuit, altering the fuzz characteristics.

Sounds

Straight out of the box, the CF-2's internal input sensitivity knob was at 100 per cent, so we assume that must be the default setting. Rather than imitating the Fuzz Face or Big Muff schools of fuzztone, the CF-2 gives a good general overview of fuzz types. By turning down the treble control and using quite high fuzz settings, you can easily get that smooth liquid sound, especially on a neck-position single-coil.

The pedal's lower fuzz settings veer more into overdrive territory and the pedal has a tight, well-defined sound. For more of this sort of thing, turn down the input sensitivity control. Careful tone shaping with the EQ controls can summon up some great tones reminiscent of the lo-fi early fuzz pedals.

Verdict

There's more choice than ever for stompbox users on a tight budget, so you can certainly find similarly priced alternatives to these Cool Cats. However, we think you'll be hard pushed to match the quality, even at double the price. There are plenty of well-established (and often quite conservative) reference points with fuzz and drive effects, but Danelectro has struck out

boldly with its own ideas and come up with some very impressive pedals here. At least one of these little chaps will soon find itself installed on this writer's pedalboard... **G**

The Bottom Line

We like: Quality sounds; excellent prices; surprise extra features

We dislike: The fiddly controls, especially on the dual EQ knobs

Guitarist says: Not all great-sounding guitar FX need to cost an arm and a leg. These upgraded Cool Cats offer boutique-like tonalities at a fraction of the price. Gear snobs might well turn up their noses, but the rest of us should be rejoicing!



Transparent Overdrive CTO-2

PRICE: £49.99

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Transparent-toned overdrive pedal

FEATURES: Dual EQ controls, internal DIP switches for extra boost and saturation

CONTROLS: Gain, treble, bass, volume

CONNECTIONS: Input, output

MIDI: No

POWER: Nine-volt battery (supplied) or DC adaptor (not supplied)

OPTIONS: None

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Test results

Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Drive CO-2

PRICE: £44.99

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Overdrive pedal

FEATURES: Internal lo-fi switch and input sensitivity control

CONTROLS: Drive, tone, volume

CONNECTIONS: Input, output

MIDI: No

POWER: Nine-volt battery (supplied) or DC adaptor (not supplied)

OPTIONS: None

Test results

Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Fuzz CF-2

PRICE: £54.99

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Fuzz pedal

FEATURES: Dual EQ controls, interior DIP switches for different levels of clipping/compression, input sensitivity control

CONTROLS: Fuzz, treble, bass, volume

CONNECTIONS: Input, output

MIDI: No

POWER: Nine-volt battery (supplied) or DC adaptor (not supplied)

OPTIONS: None

Test results

Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★