



Line 6 ToneCore pedals £78-£112

With its entry into the compact stompbox market, Line 6 produced quite a few surprises – and it isn't finished yet by Adrian Clark

PHOTOGRAPHY: GAVIN ROBERTS

DR DISTORTO

PRICE: £78

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Distortion with feedback circuit

FEATURES: Feedback circuit can produce either fundamental or octave note

CONTROLS: Level, tone, drive, rise, fall, blend; feedback off/sustain/octave, gate off/mild/clamp

CONNECTIONS: In/out

MIDI: No

POWER: 9V battery or optional DC adaptor

OPTIONS: None

Line 6
01327 302700
www.line6.com

OTTO FILTER

As Dr Distorto except...

PRICE: £78

TYPE: Dynamic filter

FEATURES: Three types of filter

CONTROLS: Sensitivity, range, peak, filter (band pass/low pass/twin filter), up/down

We reviewed the first six ToneCore pedals back in *Guitarist* 258 and were very impressed with the range and quality of the sounds that Line 6 was squeezing into such affordable stompboxes. Of course, with all that experience in digital modelling, it was hardly surprising Line 6 would eventually get around to redefining the stompbox, at least for the budget end of the market. There are now a total of 11 pedals in the ToneCore range, so let's have a look at the five new arrivals.

As before, the pedals are housed in tough powder-coated steel casings, which take up a relatively small amount of floor (or pedalboard) space, but are quite thick from top to bottom. The number and layout of knobs and switches varies from pedal to pedal and there's a risk that some of the more complex pedals could be fiddly to operate with sweaty fingers on a dim stage. The battery is housed under the footswitch, accessed by depressing both sides of its hinge. Given that they're

digital pedals, you'll need to keep an eye on the battery life; you might be better off budgeting for a power supply.

Dr Distorto

The Über Metal provided deadly distortion duties in the first batch of ToneCores, offering a range of scooped metal rhythm and thick lead tones. Dr Distorto fills a less specialised, more 'classic' niche in the ToneCore tonal palette, but it does so with a rather special trick up its sleeve.

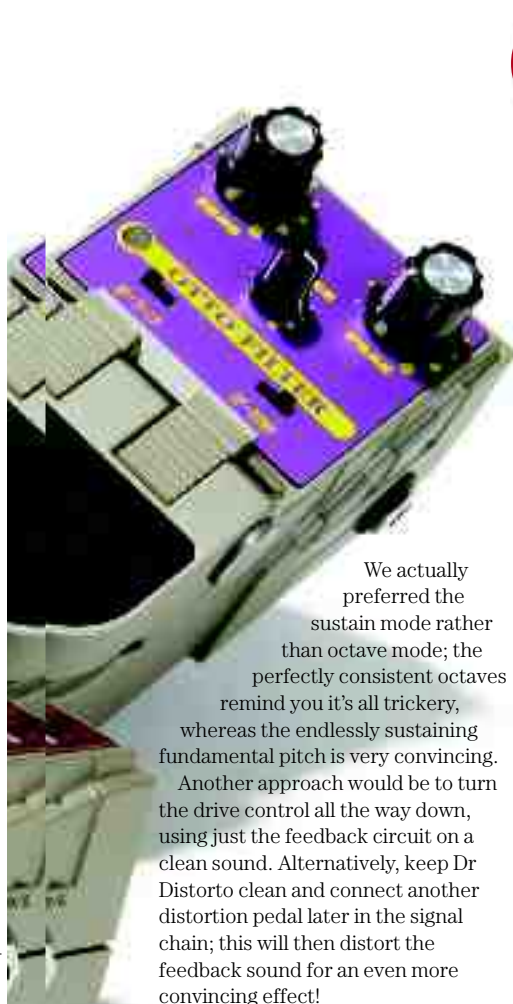
The six knobs on Dr Distorto's control panel are divided into two distinct regions. At the top are the level, tone and drive typical of most distortion pedals, and below are three controls for the built-in harmonic feedback circuit. Yes – as well as simulating the sound of high-gain valve stacks, this pedal can also replicate the sustain and feedback you get when standing in front of such things, but without the ear damage.

Operating the feedback circuit is very simple. There's a three-position switch for selecting the feedback mode. You

can either sustain the original note, generate a note an octave above or turn the feedback off altogether. Then the rise and fall controls govern the speed with which the feedback appears and disappears respectively. Finally, blend allows you to balance the feedback tone with the basic distortion tone.

The pedal also features a simple noise gate, which can be used in 'mild' mode, brutal 'clamp' mode or switched off.

SOUNDS: As a distortion pedal, Dr Distorto does a perfectly good job, aiming for somewhere among the classic Marshall tones with plenty of upper mid-range bite. However, the feedback circuit is bound to be the main attraction, and we were impressed by how well this effect blended into the overall sound. Because of the vagaries of guitars, pickups and different playing styles, it's not completely predictable, but it's quite easy to set the controls so that, with a bit of practice, you can summon stunning endless sustain on demand.



We actually preferred the sustain mode rather than octave mode; the perfectly consistent octaves remind you it's all trickery, whereas the endlessly sustaining fundamental pitch is very convincing. Another approach would be to turn the drive control all the way down, using just the feedback circuit on a clean sound. Alternatively, keep Dr Distorto clean and connect another distortion pedal later in the signal chain; this will then distort the feedback sound for an even more convincing effect!

★★★★★
Guitarist CHOICE



DR DISTORTO	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

- **WE LIKED** The cheapest and most effective way of getting fake feedback
- **WE DISLIKED** A mid-range control would be the icing on the cake!



OTTO FILTER	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

- **WE LIKED** Good range of responsiveness to pick attack; clean, quiet operation
- **WE DISLIKED** A little bit of a one-trick pony

the three; perhaps that's because it's so evocative of all those seventies funk sounds. Band pass is more like an automatic version of a standard wah pedal, but with the extra control offered by the range and peak knobs. Of the three, the twin filter is the most dramatic, but not surprisingly, it's also the hardest to fit comfortably into a musical context. It's not a million miles away from the vocal-like filters now included in several multi-effects units, and its throaty 'ya ya' sound sticks out like a sore thumb, but it's still fun!

Liqua-Flange

To call the Liqua-Flange just a flanger pedal is rather understating things. It's a lot of flangers, squashed into a tiny box, with enough flexibility to keep you occupied for weeks. Given our space restrictions, we'll keep things simple. There are three modes of operation. Analog emulates the simple flange sounds of vintage pedals, liquid uses two offset delay signals to emulate the early rackmount flangers, and digital has a flat frequency response for a more modern sound.

Whatever mode you're in, you can choose from no less than 11 waveforms, ranging from the traditional sine and vintage (the latter based on the MXR flanger) settings to the more extreme step and trigger. These waveforms can then be fine-tuned with the speed,

depth, feedback and time controls. The flange speed can also be controlled via the tap tempo function and there's yet another switch (positive/negative) for selecting the phase of the delay line.

SOUNDS: This is quite some pedal.

There's far too much to describe in detail here, but in short, the sound quality is excellent and there's a good mix of the traditional and the extreme. While the crazier sounds are impressive, the Liqua-Flange does the simple sounds well – a gentle chorus or a touch of subtle analogue sweep works well with a clean single-coil sound. The one difficulty with having so many possibilities is the lack of presets; you'll need to take note of all the cool sounds you dial in.

Roto-Machine

There's nothing new about a guitar pedal designed to sound like an organ's rotating speaker, but Line 6 has kept things traditional and authentic with the Roto-Machine. The controls are more like those on a real rotary speaker than on most of the guitar simulations. Three classic rotary speakers are modelled here: two from Leslie and one from Fender. Each one has fast and slow rotation speeds with independent speed controls; you toggle between the two speeds with the dual-action footswitch. The drive control adds overdrive to the sound, while the blend →

The rivals

DR DISTORTO	
BOSS DF-2	
(not in production)	
DigiTech Distortion	
Factory	£99
Ebow Plus	£69

You'll have to check Ebay for the legendary DF-2, as it's no longer in production, but this combined distortion/feedbacker is the nearest thing you'll get to the Dr Distorto without buying a BOSS or DigiTech multi-FX. DigiTech's Distortion Factory doesn't do the feedback, but it will give you lots of distortion flavours. And if you want to add endless sustain to anything, the Ebow is always effective, if a little cumbersome

OTTO FILTER	
Pigtronix EP-1	£199
BOSS AW-3	£89
Moogerfooger Lowpass Filter	£189

There are a handful of dynamic filter pedals out there, and many of them are not particularly cheap. Luckily, good old BOSS is there with its no-nonsense auto-wah pedal; it's nowhere near as versatile as the Otto, but it'll give you those seventies funk sounds. The Moogerfooger only does one job, but does it very well, and is perfectly suited to other instruments as well as guitar. The Pigtronix pedal is a phaser and also includes the LFO option

LIQUA-FLANGE	
BOSS BF-3	£89
Electro-Harmonix Deluxe Electric Mistress	£95
DigiTech Jimi Hendrix Experience	£199

More capable than the trusty old BF-2, the later BOSS pedal offers tap tempo and pan/gate modes. The Electric Mistress is the update of a classic old pedal; it's quite subtle, but produces a deep, rich flange. Finally, the Hendrix pedal is more of a multi-effects unit, but features flanging among its uncannily convincing Jimi-alike sounds

LIQUA-FLANGE

As Dr Distorto except...
PRICE: £89
TYPE: Flanger
FEATURES: Choice of flanger type, 11 waveforms, tap tempo
CONTROLS: Speed, feedback, depth, time, waveform, flange type (digital/liquid/analog), phase (neg/pos)
CONNECTIONS: Stereo inputs and outputs

ROTO MACHINE

As Dr Distorto except...
PRICE: £89
TYPE: Rotary speaker simulator
FEATURES: Three speaker models, independent fast and slow settings
CONTROLS: Fast, slow, drive, blend, ramp (med/fast/slow), filter (145/L16/122)
CONNECTIONS: Stereo inputs and outputs

VERBZILLA

As Dr Distorto except...
PRICE: £112
TYPE: Reverb
FEATURES: Eleven reverb algorithms, 'trails' function
CONTROLS: Mix, decay, time, tone, reverb type, trails on/off
CONNECTIONS: Stereo inputs and outputs



LIQUA-FLANGE	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★
<p>■ WE LIKED All the flanger sounds you can think of... and then some</p> <p>■ WE DISLIKED All those controls could get fiddly on a dark sweaty stage</p>	

ROTO-MACHINE	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★
<p>■ WE LIKED Nice to see the authentically 'organ-style' controls</p> <p>■ WE DISLIKED Absolutely nothing</p>	

VERBZILLA	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★
<p>■ WE LIKED Sensible range of reverbs to cover lots of styles</p> <p>■ WE DISLIKED Slight harshness on some sounds, easily tamed with the tone knob</p>	

The rivals

ROTO-MACHINE
 Roger Mayer Voodoo Vibe £249
 Voodoo Labs Microvibe £139
BOSS CE-5 £69
 Roger Mayer's Voodoo Vibe is still one of the best; consider also the cheaper Voodoo Vibe Jr. With similar historical credentials, the Microvibe is the latest incarnation of a pedal used in the late sixties by Robin Trower. The BOSS CE-5 will do a fine job of creating rotary-like sounds

VERBZILLA
BOSS RV-5 £129
 Danelectro Spring King £89
 Yamaha Magic Stomp £169
BOSS and Danelectro are still flying the flag for dedicated reverb pedals. The BOSS unit offers six reverb types along with full stereo operation, while the Danelectro pedal specialises in spring reverb, including a 'kick pad' for simulating the sound of someone kicking a reverb-equipped amp! The Magic Stomp is a multi-FX; it's compact and does reverb and delay very well

→ control balances the sounds of the (emulated) horn and drum for extra authenticity. Finally, the three-position ramp switch allows you to adjust how quickly the rotation speed moves from high to low (or vice versa) when you hit the footswitch.

SOUNDS: We'll be honest – we're suckers for a nice Leslie sound. Within just a few minutes of experimentation, we managed to get close to Stevie Ray Vaughan's sound on Cold Shot, Charlie Hunter's smoother guitar sound and played some classic B3 licks with the drive control maxed out. You don't just have to play pseudo-organ sounds, though; The Beatles, among many others, used rotary speakers on clean guitar parts, just as we've come to use chorus. The Roto-Machine is great for shimmering ambient chordal sounds, and the stereo outputs add a wonderful feeling of space to these sounds.

Verbzilla

As we racked our brains trying to think of an effect type not covered by the ToneCore range, we pulled the Verbzilla out of the box. Of course, reverb! In typical Line 6 style, there's plenty to choose from. Eleven tends to be the magic number on the more complex ToneCores, and there are 11 reverb algorithms here, selected via a rotary switch. The standard types (spring, plate, room, hall) are all here, along

with some more ambitious choices, including the dense, harmonised Octo. There are global controls for time (specifically the pre-delay time), decay (controls the length of the reverb tail), mix and tone. Finally, when the trail switch is engaged, the echoes will decay naturally, even after you've switched the effect off.

SOUNDS: There's a good mixture of reverbs here, some obvious (the '63 Spring setting is based specifically on surf guitar sounds), others more open to interpretation. Some of the settings have a slight digital brightness or harshness on the repeats, but the tone control is useful here; we managed to coax pleasantly warm sounds from all of the algorithms. There's enough flexibility from the time and decay controls to fine-tune the sounds to most requirements, and the trail switch is a very effective addition; reverb just sounds so wrong when it suddenly dies in its prime!

Unlike most of the other pedals in the ToneCore range, the Verbzilla is something of a 'blank canvas'. Rather than being obviously guitar-specific, its stereo inputs and outputs make it suitable both for keyboard or outboard recording duties.

Verdict

If anything, we're finding the second batch of ToneCores even more

impressive than the first. Although the Dr Distorto is quite specific in its function, the other four show Line 6 boldly attempting to fit entire stompbox genres into these tiny pedals and, for the most part, succeeding with flying colours. The price will be the main talking point once again, because they're more expensive than some standard stompboxes, but how else can you get this many sounds without paying at least double for a multi-effects unit? It's important not to get too carried away by the 'gee whizz' aspect of the miniaturised digital technology; this sort of thing is no longer unique, as DigiTech has shown with their artist-themed pedals. However, we like to think we're pretty discerning, and we're certainly still impressed by the ToneCores. **G**

Line 6 Dr Distorto

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

Line 6 Otto Filter

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

Line 6 Liqua-Flange

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

Line 6 Roto-Machine

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

Line 6 Verbzilla

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★