

# Villex Passive Rotary Tone Booster £68

Does your guitar need a tonic? Look no further by **Chris Vinnicombe**



Turn your Strat into a Texas twang machine!

**THERE ARE** plenty of active boost circuits out there but, let's face it, if your guitar doesn't have enough cavity space for a battery then it's either the chisel or nothing. Enter stage left the Villex Rotary Tone Booster: an American-made four-position pot with a passive, battery-free circuit that can easily be dropped into your instrument in place

of, or in addition to, your stock tone control(s). The first position is a 0dB bypass, while the others add three, five or seven dB along with a lift in a subtly different frequency range when engaged.

**SOUNDS:** With installation problems non-existent due to the supplied wiring diagram, we set about giving the Villex a workout in the bowels of several instruments. Rather than adding a huge mid spike like some competitors, the Booster seems to give your tone a wholly musical, more even lift, adding sustain and overall level and pushing the front end of your amplifier as a result. Position three (five dB) really brings to life a slightly reticent Telecaster bridge pick-up, while position four (seven dB) has a warm voicing ideal for adding girth to neck pick-up lead playing.

| PASSIVE TONE BOOSTER | TEST RESULTS |
|----------------------|--------------|
| Build quality        | ★★★★★        |
| In use               | ★★★★★        |
| Value for money      | ★★★★★        |

- **WE LIKED** Simple to install; great sounds; gives low output pickups a very serious kick
- **WE DISLIKED** Seems pricey... until you hear it in action

### Verdict

If you have a Strat with pickups that are on the weedy side, then the Rotary Tone Booster is perfect for turning your instrument into a dirty Texas twang machine. It's worth trying in just about anything though, including a bass. The circuit would work equally well in stompbox form too, the only real potential problem there being that once it is engaged it is difficult to turn off.

**Guitarist RATING** ★★★★★

**KEY INFO** VILLEX PASSIVE ROTARY TONE BOOSTER **PRICE:** £68 **TYPE:** PASSIVE BOOST CIRCUIT **TEL:** VILLEX EUROPE 07931 357451

# Dugain picks from £5.95 (exc p&p)

You have the finest guitar money can buy, now you need the pick to go with it by **Dave Burrluck**



Losing these picks could be costly

**FEW PICKS ARE MORE EXOTIC** than those hand-crafted by Jean-Charles Dugain in France from a bewildering array of materials. They've been around for some years, they're not cheap, and if you're in the habit of pinging your plectrums into the mosh pit they're probably not for you. However,

if you appreciate the finer things in life you may be interested.

We received a pocket full of different types – wooden, metal, plastic and stone – each beautifully shaped and contoured to fit comfortably between your thumb and first finger: the Dugain grip. The larger 'standard' size predominates but there are slightly smaller and thinner 'mini' picks (not available, like the left-handed picks, in all materials). The cheapest are the plastic picks, like Delrin (£5.95), up to the most expensive, mother-of-pearl, at £21.95 (see web for details).

**IN USE:** It takes a little while to adjust to the contouring but once in place both sizes feel very comfortable. The Dugains compare sound-wise to a thick and stiff 'jazz' plectrum and sound a lot fuller than a flexible plastic pick. Comparing the different materials reveals subtle tonal differences and feels. The heavier stone picks create a very dense, rounded sound; the lighter

| DUGAIN PICKS    | TEST RESULTS |
|-----------------|--------------|
| Build quality   | ★★★★★        |
| In use          | ★★★★★        |
| Value for money | ★★★★★        |

- **WE LIKED** Beautifully made; comfortable; subtle sound/feel differences
- **WE DISLIKED** Expensive for a plectrum; if you don't like stiff picks you probably won't like these

woods, like rose and box tree, have a subtly airier sound. We felt the heavier, denser picks suited electrics, the lighter pics seemed more suited to steel and nylon acoustics.

### Verdict

These are beautifully crafted, almost collectable, objects. For those of you who prefer a stiff pick they should be investigated. But they are not cheap and, as we all know too well, plectrums, like bios, have an uncanny habit of disappearing.

**Guitarist RATING** ★★★★★

**KEY INFO** DUGAIN PICKS **PRICE:** £5.95 TO £21.95 (EXC P&P) **TYPE:** EXOTIC PLECTRUMS **WEB:** WWW.DUGAINPICKS.COM

# Cooperonic Mini Tube Overdrive £85

Brit-built valve stompbox with plenty of roar appeal by Chris Vinnicombe

**WE FIRST ENCOUNTERED THE** work of Nottingham-based effects builder Martin Cooper back in issue 274 when the big, juicy sounds of his hefty Tube Overdrive pedal made us grin like cats in a creamery. Not only has that unit come down in price from £170 to £140, the slightly less flush among us will be pleased to hear that this new Mini version is hot off the workbench. In a smaller die-cast enclosure, the unit utilises a 6112 sub-mini valve – originally used in Soviet Mig-29 fighter jets and missile guidance systems – with

a bespoke power supply that ensures there's a high voltage from the supplied 12-volt mains adaptor.

The pedal's three knobs are essentially level, tone and volume pots with graphic decals denoting their function. Our only slight physical concern is that if you are intending to use it without it being fastened to some kind of pedalboard then, due to the physical height of the housing, you'll need to gaffer it to the stage to stop it flipping over when stomped hard.

and expressive lead. At full tilt proceedings are a little noisy, but not excessively so.

## Verdict

The price of £85 for a hand-built valve stompbox is far from unreasonable, so if you fancy a robust, versatile overdrive that's a little more exclusive than the competition, look no further.

**Guitarist RATING**



Impress your friends: it's got a fighter jet valve in it



### COOPERSONIC MINI TUBE TEST RESULTS

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

■ **WE LIKED** It's like adding an extra, high quality drive channel to your amplifier

■ **WE DISLIKED** A shallower housing would sit more securely onstage

**SOUNDS:** It's immediately obvious that the Mini doesn't have as much dirt and fuzziness on tap as its bigger sibling, but that's not necessarily a bad thing as the drive on offer is full-bodied and amp-like. For anything short of all-out metal there's a juicy three-dimensional drive tone that suits both chunky chordal riffs

**KEY INFO** COOPERSONIC MINI TUBE OVERDRIVE **PRICE:** £85 **TYPE:** VALVE-DRIVEN OVERDRIVE PEDAL **WEB:** WWW.COOPERSONIC.COM

# Fender Mod Shop SCN pickups from £104

Retrofit your pride and joy with legitimate, US-made replacement pickups by Simon Bradley



**ONE OF FENDER'S LESSER-**known secrets is its extensive list of accessories, and virtually anything that's fitted to an instrument owned by Fender is available as a retro-fit. We're sure there's a call for strap buttons and plate screws, but surely the most sought-after bits are genuine Fender pickups. In response, the company has released a veritable swathe of choices for Strat, Tele, Jazz and Precision that are now available here.

These sets of Samarium Cobalt Noiseless (SCN) Mod Shop pickups for Strat and Tele have been designed from the ground up by Bill Lawrence and whipped into shape by the Fender R&D department.

"Rare Earth alloys, like samarium cobalt, are used to produce permanent magnets five times stronger than any other material," Bill told us in issue 253. Each package comes complete with a palpable fifties vibe and, bizarrely, a rather unclear wiring diagram.

Each Strat pickup is available in white, as here, alongside black, aged white and parchment, while the Tele set is offered in black and chrome only.

**SOUNDS:** These pickups are fitted as standard to all US Deluxe Series guitars, so we suggest referring back to the review in issue 253 for analysis. Needless to say, they tick all the tonal boxes required by Strat and Tele players and their 100 per cent noiseless characteristics will attract many who find 50-cycle hum less than appealing.

## Verdict

Remember that these are genuine Fender products, so shouldn't unduly affect the re-sale value of your guitar.

Even the packaging is great!

In short, these pickups are competitively priced – complete Strat sets £139, Tele sets £104 – sound wonderful and possess a cool vibe. What more do you want?

**Guitarist RATING**



### FENDER MOD SHOP SCN TEST RESULTS

|                 |       |
|-----------------|-------|
| Build quality   | ★★★★★ |
| In use          | ★★★★★ |
| Value for money | ★★★★★ |

■ **WE LIKED** No other choice for a noiseless fifties Fender tone

■ **WE DISLIKED** Shame the wiring diagram is so unclear...

**KEY INFO** FENDER MOD SHOP SCN PICKUPS **PRICE:** £139 (STRAT) & £104 (TELE) **TYPE:** PICKUPS **TEL:** FENDER GBI 01342 331700