

DIGITECH HARDWIRE PEDALS £89-£129
EFFECTS



PHOTOGRAPH BY PHILIP SOWELS

DigiTech Hardwire Pedals

£89-£129

Taking a break from its plans for digital modelling nirvana, DigiTech has gone back to basics with some traditional stompboxes. Or has it? **By Adrian Clark**

Hardwire is a new product range from DigiTech, who seems to be reassessing the humble stompbox in a way we usually only associate with the smaller 'boutique' manufacturers. The buzzwords in the marketing blurb are 'superior technology', 'meticulous craftsmanship' and 'true innovation'. Truth or hyperbole? Let's find out...

All of the pedals in the range sport the same basic design, which feels tough and very well constructed. The most noticeable feature is the total lack of plastic; apart from rubber pads on the underside and the footswitch, it's metal all the way here. The control knobs are knurled metal for a better grip, and the pots click through a finely-spaced series of detents. There are two advantages to this: the stiffer movement means you can make more precise settings, and the detents mean the knobs stay where you put them.

Accidentally kicking stompbox controls is something that happens to all gigging guitarists eventually and DigiTech has another trick to help with this. Every Hardwire pedal comes with a chunky rubber attachment called a Stomplock. This fits snugly over the whole row of controls, meaning you'll never lose your favourite settings. Another couple of useful accessories are also included: a large pedalboard-ready Velcro pad can be attached to the underside instead of the existing non-slip rubber pad, and there's a luminous sticker, which fits the footswitch.

Power is via a single nine-volt battery or a barrel-type DC adaptor (not supplied). Part of the Hardwire technology provides a constant voltage throughout the life of the battery, rather than the usual gradual deterioration. Now for some specifics...

TL-2 Metal Distortion

The simplest distortion pedals generally don't offer enough

flexibility for the precise tonal demands of metal. The TL-2 has four EQ controls arranged in two sets of dual concentric knobs. There are cut/boost controls for low, high and mid-range frequencies, and the fourth control allows you to pinpoint the mid-range frequency anywhere between 200Hz and 5kHz. In addition, the voicing switch adjusts the low-end voicing between 'tight' and 'loose'.

Sounds

The bright, present sound of the pedal in 'tight' mode is ideal for a wide range of metal sounds, whether your tastes lie in old-school NWOBHM, eighties thrash or a more modern seven-string variety. The EQ controls cover a wide range, so you do have to be quite careful setting the cut or boost, especially with the mids. We find it a little too easy to go from ultra-scoop to honky quack with just a small turn of the knob. The 'loose' position on the voicing switch opens up a whole new

world of grunge and stoner rock, and these are our favourite sounds. With a touch of mid-range boost and a moderate gain setting, there are some throaty Kyuss sounds. Despite the generous amount of gain available, there's no issue with extraneous noise.

CM-2 Tube Overdrive

At a more polite end of the distortion spectrum, the CM-2 is intended to provide a transparent, responsive overdrive – no doubt influenced by the now-iconic Ibanez Tube Screamer. The EQ controls are simpler than those of the TL-2, but still more flexible than on most vintage-style overdrives, with high and low frequency cut and boost. Once again, there are two switchable modes: 'classic' and 'modified'.

Sounds

Within a couple of minutes of plugging in, we know this is our favourite of the Hardwire distortion/overdrive pedals. It does some of the best TS808-alike

tones we've heard, although the EQ controls allow for much more tonal variation. Although it'd probably be at its best adding extra boost to an already slightly overdriven amp, it can add quite a bit of gain from scratch. Strat bridge pickups can often sound a little brittle, but we produced some great fat lead sounds with just a touch of high EQ cut. Switching to 'modified' mode fattens the low-end and adds a bit more gain. TS-style pedals often 'suffer' from a lack of bass response,

The Rivals

Dealing with the easy one first, the **BOSS TU-2** (£69) has become the benchmark stompbox tuner, although studio types tend to prefer the less bombproof **TU-12** (£107). **BOSS** also build the most obvious rival to DigiTech's TL-2 in the shape of the **MT-2 Metal Zone** (£69). You won't need to look too hard to find TS808-alikes to rival the CM-2... we were blown away by the **Keeley modified TS808** (£179) but you may find the **Ibanez reissue TS9** (£99) perfectly adequate. The **SPF Green Line** (£152) and **HBE Power Screamer** (£139) offer flexible distortion sounds like the SC-2, but at a premium price. For the closest rivals to the RV-7 and DL-8, you'll just have to bite the digital modelling bullet and look at the **Verzilla** and **Echo Park** (both £112) from **Line 6**'s Tonecore range. Slightly less flexible are the **BOSS RV-5** reverb (£129) and **DD-7** digital delay (£119).

[The CM-2] does some of the best TS808-alike tones we've heard, although the EQ controls allow for more tonal variation



The CM-2 is intended to give a transparent, responsive overdrive



but this really isn't a problem with the CM-2; however, the 'modified' mode is ideal for giving single-coil pickups a helping hand.

SC-2 Valve Distortion

In between the two pedals described above, the SC-2 has the same set of controls as the CM-2, but the two voicing options are 'crunch' and 'saturated'.

Sounds

If you need a range of standard blues and rock overdrive sounds, and don't mind a bit of between-song adjustment, the SC-2 could easily do a range of jobs for you. In 'crunch' mode, the tight, bright overdrive is quite Marshall-like, and ideally suited for rock rhythm or a milder blues lead sound. The 'saturated' mode increases gain, but cuts some mid-range... we would normally have expected a mid-range boost for solos here. Still, this mode works well, especially for giving your amp a good kick in the right direction.

RV-7 Stereo Reverb

The next two pedals are the closest we've seen anyone come to the Line 6 Tonecore range. The RV-7 uses Lexicon reverb technology to create seven reverb types, and there are controls for level, decay and 'liveliness' (high frequency response). There are also stereo inputs and outputs, although the pedal will work perfectly well in a simple mono guitar-to-amp rig.

Inside the battery compartment is a hidden 'tails switch': when this is turned on, the true hardwire bypass is turned off and the reverb signal will continue to decay even after you turn the pedal off.

Sounds

The sound quality of the Hardwire range is most evident here, where the reverbs have a clarity and detail not normally found in stompboxes. If you're plugging straight into an amp, the 'spring' setting will be most appropriate. While we've heard more dramatic spring reverb effects (from Danelectro, for instance) the RV-7 certainly isn't bad at all. With the stereo ins and outs, the RV-7 isn't limited solely to guitar use. While it's no substitute for a rack reverb unit in terms of versatility, the sound quality is easily good enough for use in a compact home studio.

DL-8 Delay/Looper

Also featuring the very useful 'tails switch', the DL-8 squeezes plenty of delay applications into a small space. The first four settings gradually cover standard digital delays up to eight seconds in length, while the 'reverse' and 'modulated' settings are good for more overt delay effects. The 'loop' mode offers up to 20 seconds of stereo looping fun.

Sounds

Again, the sound quality is excellent, and the DL-8 is perfect for a player who needs a variety of delay effects without the complexity of a rack unit or multi-effects system. For live use, the footswitch can be used as a tap tempo switch, simply by holding it down for three seconds prior to setting the tempo.

Using the looper function is equally user-friendly - simply hold down the pedal to record, release to play back the loop. Overdubs can then be added



Plenty of available tones lie in the TL-2 from newer metal to eighties thrash



The DL-8 offers up to 8 seconds of delay and 20 seconds of stereo loop time

by holding down the pedal and playing again.

HT-2 Chromatic Tuner

There are no issues of tone quality or cool vintage vibe when it comes to electronic tuners – they just have to work properly. The HT-2 has dual outputs ('mute' and 'thru'), dual modes ('normal' and 'strobe') and a range of reference points, from A=437Hz to A=443. The LEDs are bright and easy to read, and yes, the HT-2 works very well!

Verdict

We've seen plenty of cool boutique stompboxes over the past few years, many of them with simply amazing sounds, but how many players can afford to pay those prices? We'd bet that the majority of players are looking for durability and versatility with the best sounds they can get for their budget, and DigiTech has aimed these Hardwire series squarely at this market. It's not a dissimilar concept to the – albeit lower priced – new Cool Cat range from Danelectro.

The solid build quality here, however, is an instant winner for gigging guitarists, the extra accessories are a nice touch and the prices are well within most people's budgets. Of course, none of this would mean a thing if the sounds weren't up to scratch, and there's a great range of top tones here. The only criticism we could level would be the lack of mid-range control on the SC-2 and CM-2, which would really have been the icing on an already highly impressive cake.

Our particular favourites proved to be the CM-2 and DL-8, simply because they do their jobs exceptionally well, but all of the pedals in the range are easily capable of taking on the competition, boutique or not. **G**

The Bottom Line

We like: Intelligently designed; sensible range of sounds

We dislike: Lack of mid-range control on the overdrives

Guitarist says: There's no shortage of stompboxes, but the Hardwires score with excellent sound quality, bomb-proof build and sensible prices. Add 'em to your list to try



TL-2 Metal Distortion

PRICE: £89
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Distortion pedal
FEATURES: True hardwire bypass, high voltage operation, constant voltage, dual modes
CONTROLS: Level, gain, high EQ, low EQ, mid EQ, mid frequency
CONNECTIONS: Input, output
MIDI: No
POWER: DC adaptor (not supplied) or nine-volt battery
OPTIONS: None
Sound Technology 01462 480000
www.digitech.com

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



RV-7 Stereo Reverb

PRICE: £119
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Reverb pedal
FEATURES: True hardwire bypass, high voltage operation, constant voltage, seven reverb types (room, plate, reverse, modulated, gated, hall, spring)
CONTROLS: Level, liveliness, decay, reverb type
CONNECTIONS: Stereo inputs and outputs
MIDI: No
POWER: DC adaptor (not supplied) or nine-volt battery
OPTIONS: None

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



CM-2 Tube Overdrive

PRICE: £89
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Overdrive pedal
FEATURES: True hardwire bypass, high voltage operation, constant voltage, dual modes
CONTROLS: Level, gain, high EQ, low EQ
CONNECTIONS: Input, output
MIDI: No
POWER: DC adaptor (not supplied) or nine-volt battery
OPTIONS: None

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



DL-8 Delay/Looper

PRICE: £129
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Delay pedal
FEATURES: True hardwire bypass, high voltage operation, constant voltage, 11 delay types (150-500ms, 500ms-1s, 1s-2s, 2s-8s, reverse, modulated, analog, slapback, lo-fi, tape, loop), tap tempo mode
CONTROLS: Level, repeats, time, delay type
CONNECTIONS: Stereo inputs and outputs
MIDI: No
POWER: DC adaptor (not supplied) or nine-volt battery

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



SC-2 Valve Distortion

PRICE: £89
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Distortion pedal
FEATURES: True hardwire bypass, high voltage operation, constant voltage, dual modes
CONTROLS: Level, gain, high EQ, low EQ
CONNECTIONS: Input, output
MIDI: No
POWER: DC adaptor (not supplied) or nine-volt battery
OPTIONS: None

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



HT-2 Chromatic Tuner

PRICE: £89
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Electronic tuner
FEATURES: True hardwire bypass, high voltage operation, constant voltage, dual modes
CONTROLS: Mode select button, reference pitch button
CONNECTIONS: Input, thru output, mute output (for silent tuning)
MIDI: No
POWER: DC adaptor (not supplied) or nine-volt battery
OPTIONS: None

Test results

Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	N/A
Value for money	★★★★★

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★