

VISUAL SOUND V2 PEDALS £99-£119
EFFECTS



PHOTOGRAPHY BY JESSE WILD

Visual Sound V2 pedals £99-£119

The maker of the highly respected Jekyll & Hyde and Route 66 pedals has revamped its product range with some tasty and creative concepts *by Adrian Clark*

Originally founded by Bob Weil in 1994, Visual Sound's breakthrough came three years later with the launch of the Jekyll & Hyde pedal. With independently adjustable overdrive and distortion effects, this dual format pedal was a prophetic taste of what was in store for the stompbox world over the next 10 years.

The current Visual Sound product range is dominated by the V2 series, a collection of nine pedals featuring some of the most popular Visual Sound tones of the past 10 years, sometimes combining two effects in a single pedal. We managed to get our inquisitive hands on five examples and took the opportunity of powering them all via another Visual Sound product, the very useful (and reasonably priced) 1-Spot pedalboard power adaptor.

All of the pedals in the V2 series follow the same basic design, although the twin-effect units are much wider than the others. The die-cast aluminium housings are solid and reassuringly weighty and the distinctive large footswitches feel sturdy (Visual Sound claims that the switches will last for 10 million stomps!).

The battery is conveniently situated behind a securely locked plastic flap, although a 9V DC adaptor is, of course, another option. Some clever engineering means that accidentally attaching a 9V AC supply will simply make for a silent pedal, rather than a broken pedal, which is the usual result! Also on the subject of clever engineering, rather than having true bypass switching the Visual Sound stompboxes all have a unity gain preamp buffer, which counteracts the frequency loss caused by long cable runs.

Enough of the general features; let's get down to specifics...

Son Of Hyde

Not everyone needs the dual overdrive/distortion of the Jekyll & Hyde, so this pedal has just the distortion channel. The chunky knobs control drive, treble, mid and volume, and there's a bright switch for extra sizzle. Inside, there's also a variable noise gate (that you can turn off, thankfully) and also a mini-pot for bass – set at maximum as standard.

Sounds

In normal (non-bright) mode, the pedal has a generous, but tightly controlled bass response. As it happens, the bright switch affects the bass response; while the treble control seems to leave the bottom end unaffected, the bright switch raises the entire tonal spectrum of the pedal considerably. Using a

Fender Strat, we managed to pinpoint some great tones by setting combinations of treble, mid and bright.

That said, the mid-range control seems quite subtle on single-coils, although it really comes into its own on humbuckers. Boosting the mid frequencies adds plenty of thick, focused sustain ideal for use with vintage-voiced humbuckers.





Cutting the mids results in a tighter sound that responds well to high-output pickups.

Overall, the Son Of Hyde has a naturally quite 'gritty' distortion tone, without sounding ugly. There's always a very crisp attack, even at high gain settings.

Route 808

Following logically, here's the other channel from the Jekyll & Hyde in single-pedal format. Designed to give the same distinctive tone as the original (and now legendary) TS808 Tube Screamer from the seventies, Visual Sound has added its own electronic refinements. The most noticeable of these is a bass boost switch, offering a great alternative to the rather mid-dominant sound of most Tube Screamer clones. The other controls are the familiar drive, tone and volume.

Sounds

The Route 808 certainly does a fine job of creating the signature TS808 sound, although with a crisper, more 'alive' tone than many of the vintage originals, and of course a much more generous bass response. Even with the bass boost turned off, the Route 808 has a much more balanced tonal response than we expected – it's up at the top of our '808-alike Top 10' with the Keeley-modded pedal.

Adding the bass boost makes it possible to get more of an old-style fuzz sound from the pedal; high gain settings are more squishy and saturated. There's plenty of output to be had from the Route 808 and it'll add plenty of grit to quite a clean amp sound.

Double Trouble

So, given the flexibility of the Route 808, what happens when you just can't do without having that crisp Tube Screamer boost as well as a more strident overdrive? Well, the Double Trouble could be just what you need as it is

[The Route 808] has more 'alive' tone than many of the vintage originals



Inspired by the Ibanez TS808 Tube Screamer, but with added bass thanks to this switch...

The Rivals

Overdrive/distortion

The other most impressive Tube Screamer-alike we've heard was the **Keeley-modded TS808** (£179). If the exact Tube Screamer tone isn't important, the **Xotic AC and RC boosters** (£129) are very eloquent-sounding. For extra gain potential, the **HBE Power Screamer** (£139) is a great pedal, covering elements of the Route 808 and Son Of Hyde. There's no shortage of distortion pedals, but if you want versatility, the **Tonebone Trimode** (£269) is hard to beat.

Fuzz/Octave

Octave fuzz pedals have great retro fashion cred so there are a few around. Our favourites recently have been **Roger Mayer's Vision Octavia** (£146) and the **Pigtronix Disnortion** (£179), which also has an overdrive setting.

Chorus

The chorus genre is waiting for the eighties revival to kick in, so you're best off with the big names. The **BOSS CH-1** (£59) is a user-friendly stereo chorus while the **CE-20** (£149) uses digital modelling to revive some classic vintage Roland sounds.



The Double Trouble is essentially two Route 808s in one chassis

The [Angry Fuzz] is more than just a fuzz pedal as it features an octave circuit

essentially two Route 808s cleverly fitted into one box.

Sounds

We've already covered the sound of the basic Route 808, and obviously this pedal allows you to make further use of that flexibility, but the real bonus here is the ability to chain the two overdrives together for a third



sound. This makes for a huge range of tones, not least because the second overdrive stage behaves differently according to how the first is set up. We set up distinctly different sounds on the two channels, turned them both on, and then reversed the settings... the two resulting sounds were pleasingly different.

Our only criticism of this approach is that it takes two stomps to change from one setting to another; we wondered how easy it would be to add an optional 'either/or' mode, where switching one channel on would automatically switch the other off.

Angry Fuzz

This new addition to the Visual Sound range is more than just a regular fuzz pedal, featuring as it does an octave circuit (like that classic Hendrix effect, the Octavia) and a bright switch. The fuzz and octave effects (the latter marked 'anger') can be controlled independently, and there's also a volume level control.

Sounds

To our ears, this is the best of the bunch. The retro stompbox craze has brought us all manner of squishy, ratty, flutey and plain nasty fuzz pedals, so we ought to be getting rather jaded, but the

Angry Fuzz is a breath of fresh air.

Leaving aside the 'anger' and bright features for the moment, the pedal's basic fuzz sound is at the smooth 'flutey' end of the scale. By playing accurate, single-note lines with a high fuzz setting, the attack all but disappears on the high notes, while low notes have a nice cello-esque texture. As with the Route 808, it's nice to hear a more generous bass response than on many of the vintage originals.

The bright switch is quite subtle, especially at higher fuzz settings, and is only really apparent on the attack part of the notes, so hit the strings harder if you want to hear the brightness! The real fun starts when you blend in the anger (octave) effect. This is exactly what you hear on those classic Roger Mayer pedals, adding an insistent upper octave to single notes and creating ring-modulator-style mayhem when you play two notes together. As usual, we got the best results by using the neck pickup on a Strat and turning the guitar's tone control right down; the bright control is a useful addition here, as it stops the tone from being slushy.

Lower fuzz settings also work well for gritty overdrive tones, with or without the anger feature. By setting the fuzz very low and the anger high, we were able to get some great percussive sounds reminiscent of a ring modulator.

Liquid Chorus

Another well-loved Visual Sound

twofer is the H2O chorus/echo pedal, the original incarnation of which we reviewed back in 2002. The H2O is now available in V2 form, but you can also get just the chorus part in this Liquid Chorus. The basic character of the chorus effect is set by means of the depth control, and then you can fine-tune the speed, width and delay time. Unlike the other pedals in the V2 range, the Liquid Chorus has stereo outputs for maximum lushness, although there's a small switch on the circuit board in case you prefer the wet/dry output configuration of the H2O.

Sounds

The usual stereotypes apply here... 'lush', 'rich' and 'custard' (no, really) were the first words that came to mind when we demoed the Liquid Chorus. The building blocks are the speed and depth controls, found on just about all chorus pedals, and the width control gives you an extra level of control over the modulation shape. Increasing the delay time makes the chorusing less dense and possibly (we couldn't be certain) reduces the bass response ever so slightly.

If you've only ever used the simplest speed/depth chorus pedals (such as the trusty BOSS CE-2) in the past, you may find the Liquid Chorus a little confusing, but the best approach is to dive in and start experimenting. We found some great tones, from slow and shallow Alex Lifeson chord



enhancements to pronounced Jonny Greenwood wobbles.

Verdict

We've always been impressed by Visual Sound pedals in the past, and these V2 pedals are quite something. Unlike some small-scale pedal manufacturers, who design a huge range of pedals as if to carpet bomb the market, Visual Sound has concentrated on

perfecting a small selection of essential tones. The clever bit is that they're then not afraid to recycle these tones in different pedals; it might seem like cheating to some people, but this is basically what the large manufacturers do when they launch a range of stompboxes and a range of multi-effects units side-by-side. If you've got a good sound, it makes perfect sense to make

that sound available to as many people as possible.

The build quality and design of the V2 pedals is so good, we can't really think of any criticisms that don't boil down to anything other than personal taste. They're not unusually cheap, but by the standards of most small-scale US manufacturers, they're certainly not particularly expensive, either. All in all, they're hard to fault. **G**



The Liquid Chorus sounds lush, rich and, er, custardy...

The bottom line

Visual Sound V2 pedals

We like: Creative uses of some high quality tones in every function; well thought-through packages

We dislike: Apart from matters of taste, nothing

Guitarist says: Don't overlook Visual Sound in your search for ultimate tone. Like us you might be surprised by the quality and versatility this expanded range has to offer.



Visual Sound Double Trouble

PRICE: £149.95

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Dual-channel overdrive pedal

CONTROLS: Drive, tone, volume and bass boost switch on both channels

CONNECTIONS: Input, output

POWER: DC adaptor (not supplied) or PP3 battery

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Visual Sound Son Of Hyde

PRICE: £99.95

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Distortion pedal

CONTROLS: Drive, treble, mid, volume, bright switch

CONNECTIONS: Input, output

POWER: DC adaptor (not supplied) or PP3 battery

Headline Music 01223 874301

www.visualsound.net

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Visual Sound Route 808

PRICE: £99.95

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Overdrive pedal

CONTROLS: Drive, tone, volume, bass boost switch

CONNECTIONS: Input, output

POWER: DC adaptor (not supplied) or PP3 battery

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Visual Sound Angry Fuzz

PRICE: £119.95

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Octave fuzz pedal

CONTROLS: Volume level, fuzz level, anger level, bright switch

CONNECTIONS: Input, output

POWER: DC adaptor (not supplied) or PP3 battery

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Visual Sound Liquid Chorus

PRICE: £119.95

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Chorus pedal

CONTROLS: Depth, speed, width, delay time

CONNECTIONS: Input, stereo outputs

POWER: DC adaptor (not supplied) or PP3 battery

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★