

Hotone Skyline Series Pedals **£55 each**

This big range of petite pedals brings bucket loads of tone to your 'board

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Just when you thought effects pedals couldn't get any smaller, the Hotone Skyline Series appears, consisting of the dinkiest stompboxes we've ever seen. Don't be fooled by their toy-like appearance, though; these pedals are right at home on a 'board, with sturdy zinc alloy casings and true-bypass switching. Unsurprisingly, the units are too small to house a battery (they're not much larger than a pair of nine-volt batteries themselves!), so they rely on a nine-volt adaptor as a power source. Common features include one large transparent knob that lights up when the pedal is engaged, two smaller glow-in-the-dark knobs, and a small button to switch in a different mode. Here, we've chosen six from the range of 10: a delay pedal, a compressor, a boost, a distortion and a pair of drives.



Hotone Eko

PRICE: £55
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Delay pedal
FEATURES: True bypass
CONTROLS: Time, echo, repeat, modulation switch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied)
DIMENSIONS: 44 (w) x 74 (d) x 44mm (h)
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The Eko is a digital delay with a direct analogue signal path for the dry sound and comes with a pretty standard knob array to control delay time, delay volume and the amount of repeats. It also has a switch to add modulation. There's a very practical range of delay available here, from a clangy tin-bath reverb, through cool 1950s slapback, to the longer delays that top out at around 500 milliseconds.

The repeats are not squeaky clean and seem to exhibit a useful degree of degradation as they die away, blending into the sound. The modulation option is not the gentle chorus effect that you get in some pedals; there's a fairly obvious pitch shift if you have your delay mix set high, but used sensibly, it can add a useful hint of tape delay flavour.

Verdict

As with all of these Hotone pedals, the combination of compact size and low price has considerable appeal. If that's what you need, this is a good basic delay that shouldn't disappoint.

GUITARIST RATING

★★★★★

Guitarist says: A delay that adds space to your sound (and saves it on your 'board)



Hotone Komp

PRICE: £55
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Compressor pedal
FEATURES: True bypass
CONTROLS: Compression, volume, tone, spark switch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied)
DIMENSIONS: 44 (w) x 74 (d) x 44mm (h)

As with all the Hotone pedals, the adjustment of the key parameter is assigned to the large transparent knob on the front surface. Here, it turns up the compression. The other knobs are for volume and tone, similar to the Diamond Compressor on which we suspect it may be based.

Compression is nice and smooth, adding a not unpleasant 'snap' to your note as it's increased. Around the mid position of the tone knob you get a fairly neutral sound, but you can emphasise the highs and reduce the bass clockwise and boost bass while reducing highs the other way: a useful range. There's also the Spark switch, which boosts top end.

Verdict

At this size, there's no excuse not to squeeze another pedal on your 'board. This is a practical compressor with some useful tonal options and a trick up its zinc-alloy sleeve: you can turn up the volume and compression to a point that will drive a valve amp into distortion (albeit with a lot of compression).

GUITARIST RATING

★★★★★

Guitarist says: A compact compressor that can bring in a tonal shift if needed





Hotone Liftup

PRICE: £55

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Boost pedal

FEATURES: True bypass

CONTROLS: Boost,

volume, tone, warm switch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied)

DIMENSIONS: 44 (w) x 74 (d) x 44mm (h)

Hotone's intention here is to deliver a clean boost with tonal shaping capability courtesy of boost and volume knobs that can be juxtaposed to give you the extra volume you need, plus a tone knob and a Warm switch. There's lots of boost, from a small ramping up of your clean volume, through various levels of clean boost, to the highest travels of the knobs, where you'll get enough extra gain to tease some crunch out of a clean valve amp and take an overdriven amp up a level.

Tonally, you can keep the transition smoothest if you set the tone knob around 10 o'clock. Treble boost can be dialled in clockwise from there. Combined with the Warm switch that broadens the midrange, there are options to beef up and brighten your tone as the boost kicks in, which might be just what's needed for lead breaks.

Verdict

This provides an inexpensive way to get an instant clean volume boost, but it will also add welly to your valve amp sounds.

GUITARIST RATING

★★★★★

Guitarist says: A tiny box that's great for a useful kick up in volume with tonal shift



Hotone Chunk

PRICE: £55

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Distortion pedal

FEATURES: True bypass

CONTROLS: Gain, volume, tone, hot switch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied)

DIMENSIONS: 44 (w) x 74 (d) x 44mm (h)

Following the time-tested diode-clipping paradigm that features in many distortion pedals, the Chunk's circuit includes four diodes and is designed to deliver a Marshall-style distortion. On firing up the pedal, that flavour does become apparent – and you're treated to a wide range of Brit crunch tones that start from a slightly overdriven boost and can run through to a stack in full flight. The Hot switch is a bit of a misnomer, though; lukewarm would be nearer the mark. It's supposed to spice up the tone, but only makes a marginal difference.

Still, if you like high-gain sounds there are enough here, all via a tone knob that gives you plenty of opportunity to set the EQ just right, particularly if you like your top end – and it can get piercingly bright.

Verdict

This is worth a look for anyone that wants some latter-day Brit raunch, and could put you in the zone for all of your chordal, riffing and lead work if you play hard rock and metal.

GUITARIST RATING

★★★★★

Guitarist says: Decent distortion for rock and metal with a British flavour



HOTONE SKYLINE SERIES PEDALS £55 EACH

PEDAL ROUND-UP



Hotone Grass

PRICE: £55

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Drive pedal

FEATURES: True bypass

CONTROLS: Gain, volume, voice, bright switch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied)

DIMENSIONS: 44 (w) x 74 (d) x 44mm (h)

Look beyond their toy-robot-like aesthetics, and you'll find that these pedals are actually really solidly built from zinc alloy, and come 'board-ready with a choice of pads (plain and Velcro) to attach to their base to stop them slipping around. Presumably called Grass because it's green, and presumably green because it takes its inspiration from another famously green pedal, this is an overdrive in the Tube Screamer tradition (although Hotone tells us it's based on the sound of a rare and ultra-desirable Dumble amplifier...).

Compared directly to our TS-808, the Green has a similar gain range and is very close in its midrange voicing with a tone knob covering a similar frequency span, although it can add a bit more top end with the Bright switch engaged.

Verdict

There are loads of Tube Screamer-style pedals out there to add a level of overdrive to your amp, and the Grass joins them with the advantage of being one quarter of the size of the real thing.

GUITARIST RATING

★★★★★

Guitarist says: A Tube Screamer vibe in a much smaller package



Hotone Blues

PRICE: £55

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Drive pedal

FEATURES: True bypass

CONTROLS: Gain, volume, tone, fat switch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied)

DIMENSIONS: 44 (w) x 74 (d) x 44mm (h)

Probably taking its inspiration from the popular Boss BD-2 Blues Driver, the Blues pedal is designed to offer a natural valve amp-like overdrive, something that it actually does very well. What you get is an articulate overdrive sound that responds well to playing dynamics, with a transparent clarity in the midrange.

The range of sounds available starts off with a clean boost with the volume knob past centre and gain knob at minimum. There's plenty of variation on that just-breaking-up grit until you get to the sound of naturally overdriven valve raunch. Tonally, there's a slight treble boost with the tone knob at minimum: you can dial in more presence in a limited but practical range, while the Fat switch gives you extra lower midrange.

Verdict

If you're looking for low-to-medium overdrive there are plenty of options out there, but this offers good value for money and will be a practical asset in front of a clean or slightly dirty amp.

GUITARIST RATING

★★★★★

Guitarist says: An understated overdrive for lower levels of grit

