

GEAR HEAD TO HEAD

BLACKSTAR VS TC ELECTRONIC





VS

Words Ed Mitchell

BLACKSTAR HT-DELAY VS TC ELECTRONIC FLASHBACK

Two delay stompboxes – one valve-powered, the other with USB connectivity – face each other in a fight to the death. Find out which one is most worthy of a repeat performance

WHEN you think of classic delay sounds (or echo, if you like to rock it old-school) there are a few that have become clichés. There's rockabilly slapback, inspired by Sam Phillips' Sun Studio recordings of Elvis Presley in 50s Memphis; Hank Marvin's echo-drenched sound on hits by The Shadows like *FBI* and *Apache*; and U2 guitarist, The Edge, who has made delay a major component of the band's best tracks (what would *Where The Streets Have No Name* be without those delay sounds?). You would think that was the whole echo/delay thing covered. Not so. The latest generation of pedals comes loaded

with a wide range of delay types allowing you to put your own stamp on this popular effect.

On the face of it, two of these new stompboxes, the Blackstar HT-Delay and TC Electronic Flashback, both do a very similar job: you hit your guitar strings and the sound repeats. Dig deeper, though, and there are a couple of twists in their respective spec sheets. The big-arse Blackstar has a valve in its circuitry while the smaller TC Electronic allows you to connect it to a laptop and download artist presets. Both offer a looper function. Let's take a closer look, and find out which is best, without delay. You know what we mean...

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BLACKSTAR
HT-DELAY **£199**

A big pedal with features and sounds to match

WHILE the HT-Delay is more than twice the size of the TC Electronic Flashback, the real story with the Blackstar pedal is the 12AX7 valve that glows (courtesy of an LED) when you plug it in. Like the gang at TC Electronic, Blackstar has designed its new delay to offer the old-school warmth of analogue technology in a digital package. That explains the valve. Blackstar reckons that the gain and compression provided by the 12AX7 valve replicates the dynamics of vintage tape-driven echo units. We'll see.

This pedal comes loaded with eight different delay types. These are Linear; a full bandwidth delay; Analogue, a vintage stompbox; two Multihead delays; Tape, based on tape-driven units like the classic 60s WEM Copicat; Space, a vintage tape-driven echo likely inspired by the old Roland Space Echo; and a pair of loop functions.

Loop 1 allows you to lay one looped track, while Loop 2 facilitates sound-on-sound loops. Because of the inclusion of a valve, the HT-Delay is mains driven only. A power adaptor is included, which is just as well really.

Plugging in, you should be struck by the warmth of the HT-Delay. It sounds analogue to us, especially when you crank up the Saturation control, which adds compression and a dirty growl to your repeats. Like any well designed stompbox, the Blackstar is easy to navigate. You simply pick a delay type and tweak it with other controls. Time adjusts the time between repeats. The maximum delay time using the

knob is 1.5 seconds. You can increase this to 3 seconds using the Tap footswitch. Moving on, Feedback controls the number of repeats. The Level control isn't a volume; it actually varies the balance between the dry signal (the sound of your guitar) and the effected sound. This control can be useful if the sound of your guitar is being buried by the delay effect. Turn it down a bit and the balance will be restored.

AT A GLANCE

- TYPE:** Valve delay
- EFFECTS:** Delay, multi-head delay, looper
- CONTROLS:** Effect, time, feedback, saturation, level, tap/loop switch
- SOCKETS:** Mono input; mono and stereo outputs
- TRUE BYPASS:** Yes
- POWER:** DC adaptor (supplied)
- CONTACT:** Blackstar Amplification 01604 652844 blackstaramps.co.uk

Like the TC pedal, using the looper function on the HT-Delay is a doddle. You get 7.2 seconds of recording time. The cool feature of Loop 2 is that you can overdub as many times as you want. We kicked off with a chord sequence, then overdubbed a slide riff. Very cool. You then have the option of overdubbing more guitar parts or activating the playback mode, which allows you to play along with the loop without overdubbing. It takes a bit of practice to get the timing right, but it's a killer tool for recording or live work.

The HT-Delay is a cracking bit of kit. It has all the delay capabilities to suit any guitar player from rockabilly effects to electro soundscapes, and the valve is likely to be a magnet for traditionalists. You should add the HT-Delay to your must-try list.

SUMMARY	FEATURES	■	■	■	■	■	■
	SOUND QUALITY	■	■	■	■	■	■
	VALUE FOR MONEY	■	■	■	■	■	■
	BUILD QUALITY	■	■	■	■	■	■
	USEABILITY	■	■	■	■	■	■
	OVERALL RATING	★★★★★					



We love the HT-Delay's valve powered tone...

TC ELECTRONIC FLASHBACK £125

A tasty morsel that just keeps repeating on us

TC Electronic has squeezed an awful lot of functions into its new Flashback Delay. Presented in a small pedal format, the Flashback is true bypass, so it doesn't influence your tone when it's switched off. However, it also has a buffered bypass mode that's activated by an internal switch. A buffer is useful if you like to cram a music shop's worth of gear into your pedalboard. Too many pedals or extra long cables can suck the top end and volume from your signal chain.

Using a buffer helps to restore the integrity of your signal, and the Flashback also lets you turn your dry signal off in buffered mode.

The Flashback can be run with a nine-volt battery or a mains adaptor (not supplied). Batteries die young in digital pedals so we'd plump for a mains unit from the get go.

Control-wise, you get knobs to select the delay type, FX Level, Delay and Feedback. With the exception of the rockabilly style slapback (20 to 300 milliseconds), all of the Flashback's delays have a range of 20 milliseconds to 7,000 milliseconds (7 seconds). The delay time can be set by hitting the strings on your guitar using the Audio Tap function. The signal is actually muted while this is happening. It's basically the same as using the tap switch on the HT-Delay, but we found it more intuitive in action.

The Flashback offers 10 delay types. These are 2290, based on the industry standard digital TC Electronic 2290; Ana, aka analogue; Tape, based on 60s tape-driven units; Lofi, which

degrades the sound quality of the repeats; Dyn, again based on the sound of the TC 2290; Mod, which adds vibrato to the repeats; 'P Pong', which pans the repeats from left to right in the stereo mode; Slap, rockabilly style echo, natch; RVS to reverse the inputted signal; and Loop, which is exactly what you'd expect.

The Flashback might not boast a valve in its engine room, but it does share the old-school warmth of its rival. The vintage tape

replication is especially effective, as is the added vibrato of the Mod setting. The reverse mode is good fun (The Beatles would've loved it), and the Loop function is as easy to use as that of the HT-Delay. While the Blackstar offers 7.2 seconds of recording time, the Flashback brandishes an impressive 40 seconds in mono and 20 seconds in stereo. You can also overdub parts to your heart's content.

The Tone Print function lets you download artist presets

from the TC Electronic website using a USB cable (included). It's a cool feature, but we reckon there's enough going on in the pedal itself to keep you happy.

The Blackstar HT-Delay is undoubtedly great, but the TC Electronic Flashback pips it to the post here thanks to its array of features. It's compact, high-spec'd and a joy to explore. We want one.

AT A GLANCE

- TYPE:** Digital delay
- EFFECTS:** Delay, looper, reverse delay
- CONTROLS:** Delay type, delay, FX level, feedback, 'subdivision' switch, effect on/off switch
- SOCKETS:** Mono and stereo inputs; mono and stereo outputs, power in
- TRUE BYPASS:** Switchable
- POWER:** 9V battery / DC adaptor (not supplied)
- CONTACT:** TC Electronic
0800 917 8926
tcelectronic.com

SUMMARY	FEATURES	■
	SOUND QUALITY	■
	VALUE FOR MONEY	■
	BUILD QUALITY	■
	USEABILITY	■
OVERALL RATING	★★★★★	



...but the Flashback's features grab it the gold