1 Positive Grid Bias Mini Guitar
£876

2 Universal Audio OX Amp Top Box
£1,099

Guitar tone hardware

Perfect guitar tone for recording was, until recently, reliant on good amplification, microphones and space. Praise be then, for the rise of cab sims and amp emulation. Here are three options that give tonal variety, minus the headache

1 Positive Grid's smallest guitar amp gives the Gigboard a run for its money in the 'most portable' stakes. Any gigging guitarist is going to find the diminutive and lightweight form to be back saving, but still able to deliver with 300w of power at 4 Ohms. While PG has managed to condense its Head and Rack editions into a smaller package, there are obvious omissions to the amount of control on the front panel. This is only an issue if you're constantly tweaking your tone on the fly, as the app more than makes up for it.

It's the cab and amp emulation where the Bias family really earns its stripes. The Mini Guitar comes bundled with the Bias Amp Designer software, which offers a great deal of tweakabillty. You're able to change up the preamp and power amp circuitry, as well as get stuck into a spot of tube-rolling, all without the worries that come with the real thing. positivegrid.com

VERDICT 9.0

2 UA's OX is a different proposition altogether compared to the previous two, as it doesn't emulate any amplifier models. It does, however, let you switch up cab and mic simulations for your existing amp. This solution to capturing guitar tone comes in the form of a hybrid load box. The OX takes the speaker load from any tube amp and combines it with up to six Rig settings, all tunable via the free app (iPad only).

As with any UA product, this is a premium device and perhaps the OX's only downfall is price, as everything else is perfect for recording guitar within a wide variety of different digital scenarios. Balanced and speaker outs also mean the OX is more than capable in a live environment, instantly transforming your tired old amp into a flexible, modern hybrid. uaudio.com

VERDICT 9.2

3 Of the three options here, the Gigboard is the only pedal-based product and more of an all-round tool with a huge array of effects onboard, not just amp emulations. The second product to come from the newly-formed Headrush brand, it's a scaled-down version of the original Pedalboard in size and price, but not in its feature set. Amazingly, at nearly half the price of its predecessor, the Gigboard has 'nowt taken out'.

The Eleven HD Expanded DSP software, is, for the most part, excellent. There is a dizzying array of effects at your finger/toe tips, while the interface and workflow is intuitive. The hardware side of things is also well implemented, with pretty much all control available via the stomp buttons, as well as the touchscreen. We have slight misgivings with some of the guitar tones though. Most notable is the presence of unwanted artefacts on the tails in some of the high gain models. Not a deal-breaker by any means and only spotted under intense scrutiny. Within a mix, it would be nigh-on impossible to hear. headrushfx.com

VERDICT 8.9

FM VERDICT

THE HIGH PERFORMER There's nothing better than the real thing. Luckily, the OX Amp Top Box is even better than the real thing. A big plus is that it's so easy to use. We were really quite amazed at the new life it breathed into our test amplifier. The OX is pretty much your amp, but on steroids.

THE BEST VALUE The Bias Mini Guitar only just pips the Headrush for its thorough, detailed amp modelling. Like the Headrush, the Amp Designer software also gives access to an online community of users sharing models and presets.

3 Headrush Gigboard £519