



VS

Words: Henry Yates

WAY HUGE ELECTRONICS RINGWORM VS ELECTRO- HARMONIX RING THING

Marmite has nothing on the opinion-splitting power of the ring modulator. Here's a showdown with the most loved/hated effect on the market...



ALL the effects on your pedalboard have their own distinct personality. The overdrive is the passive-aggressive alpha male; the wah, the afro'd porn star. The ring modulator, meanwhile, is the sci-fi-obsessed oddball that sits alone in its bedroom watching *Star Trek*, or at least that's the popular perception of this much-maligned effect. Its moments of glory in the work of Incubus, Neal Schon and Black Sabbath (try the *Paranoid* solo) are tarnished by endless web forums claiming that it's irritating, atonal, unpredictable and only ever sounded decent when used for the Daleks' "Exterminate!" catchphrase.

There's no room here to fully explain the science – and it'd only make your ears bleed anyway – but ring

modulators basically work by taking your guitar signal, multiplying it with a second signal from an internal oscillator, and then relaying their sum and difference frequencies. In the wrong hands, and with the wrong settings, the results can often be harsh and inharmonic – like a whole orchestra of bum notes. But used expertly, these units can produce beautiful, bell-like sounds and be both otherworldly and utterly refreshing in a world of identikit tones.

The market isn't saturated with ring modulators, but TG found two units with a strong reputation for under £200 in the form of the Way Huge Electronics Ringworm and the Electro-Harmonix Ring Thing (both £179). Let's throw them into the ring...

WAY HUGE ELECTRONICS RINGWORM £179

Talk about opening a can of worms

WAY Huge might trumpet the Ringworm's "crazy freaked-out madness", but first-time ring-dingers may have some other choice words to describe this new analogue modulator pedal. During early experimentation, you might conclude it produces an unbearable and entirely random racket, sounding like a Whammy pedal that's been left out in the rain. Stick with it, though, and you'll slowly start to master its features and learn which modes suit you. This beast can be tamed – it just takes patience.

Despite a tough and compact aluminium chassis that suggests live work, the Ringworm seems more geared towards studio boffins to us. It certainly packs in the features, with a five-position Mode dial giving you a choice over the shape of the low frequency oscillator's (LFO)

soundwaves, as well as slightly fiddly controls for fine-tuning the sweep rate and pitch. These are also controllable via an expression pedal if you've got your hands full and happen to own one. It's a solid range of options, but don't forget you're still paying £179 for a standalone pedal.

In application, you could argue that the Ringworm's most critical dial is the Blend, which sets the overall wet/dry level of the effect. Take it any further than halfway and you'll struggle to use this unit for any practical rock 'n' roll purpose, though. Likewise, some of the Mode settings can be eliminated straight out of the box, such as the Random position,

whose arbitrary jumps between seven different frequencies turn out to be hilariously useless in practice.

So, yeah, it's undoubtedly true that the Ringworm can sound terrible. But a little dabbling also unlocks some genius sounds. With a dash of reverb on a more predictable setting such as Square Wave (which bounces between two frequencies), it stops you in your tracks, sounding like

a funeral organ at the low register and giving the impression that a second guitarist is playing under you when you climb higher up the neck. It's important to stress that playing style is a factor too, with single notes working better than chords.

The Ringworm is capable of producing some diverse sounds:

from crazy, synth-style funk through to mind-melting electro noises. It's a stretch to describe this pedal as essential, but the Ringworm is a maverick's dream and far more fun than the fungal skin infection of the same name. Trouble is, we've had a glimpse of what's coming next. We like the Ringworm, but we're not gonna put a ring on it till we've tried the Electro-Harmonix.

AT A GLANCE

TYPE: Ring modulator pedal
CONTROLS: Blend, frequency, mode, width, rate
SOCKETS: In, out, expression pedal
POWER: 18-volt adaptor (supplied)
CONTACT: John Hornby
 Skewes 0113 286 5381
www.wayhuge.com

SUMMARY	FEATURES	
	SOUND QUALITY	
	VALUE FOR MONEY	
	BUILD QUALITY	
	USABILITY	
	OVERALL RATING	★★★★



The Ringworm could get under your skin



ELECTRO-HARMONIX RING THING £179

We've found ourselves the ring leader...



Ding ding! The EHX Ring Thing walks away as our winner



FX

daddy Electro-Harmonix has some serious form in the modulation game, and the Ring Thing seems like the next step on from the Frequency Analyzer ring mod. The Ring Thing bolsters that pedal's features with a wave-shape selector, a sweepable filter and space for saving bespoke sounds, all while remaining competitive at £179. Sure, you'd broadly describe this unit as a ring modulator, but it also expands on the brief with a two-octave pitchshifter and single sideband modulation. The latter works like ring modulation, but lets you isolate either the upper or lower band for more, ahem, 'harmonious' results.

All that information, plus the twinkling array of LEDs and dials on the brick-size chassis, initially means the Ring Thing feels like more of a headache than the Ringworm. Our advice: take it slow. The basic first step is to cycle through the four modes. Once you spot potential, take hold of the dials and start fine-tuning the mayhem in real-time.

As ever, it's possible to make a truly hideous noise with this pedal, but the Ring Thing is rescued by a fantastic sense of variety – each wave shape really has its own personality – plus a manual whose idiot-proof prescribed settings save you from too much earache. You can make it sound like Davros, but you can also make it sound like

Roger McGuinn and Tom Morello. For a standalone pedal, we reckon that's a result.

One annoyance with the Ringworm was the syndrome of finding a decent sound and then promptly losing it when you nudged the dials. That's a tangible advantage of the Ring Thing; once you've got a sound that satisfies your vision, you can save it into one of nine preset slots. Better

still, you can cycle through your bespoke tones using a second footswitch – with the LEDs keeping you informed of what you've got selected – instead of crouching on a darkened stage, setting parameters by hand. As well as the ring mod sounds, the Ring Thing's polyphonic Pitch-Shift mode can deliver some altogether

different effects. Anything from a detuned chorus to drop tunings and full-blown whammy effects (when an expression pedal is connected) is possible, and we're surprised that EHX doesn't shout about these features more.

It's a tough call, but we reckon the Ring Thing's features add up to a pedal that's feasible for both mind-bending bedroom sonic adventurers and road-worn gigsters. We have ourselves a winner – albeit one for which the phrase 'try before you buy' could have been invented...

AT A GLANCE

TYPE: Ring modulator pedal

CONTROLS: Blend, wave, filter/rate, fine/depth, coarse, mode, bypass, preset/tune

SOCKETS: 2x inputs, expression pedal, mono L/R outputs

POWER: 9-volt adaptor (supplied)

CONTACT: Hot Rox 0115 9873 163 www.ehx.com

SUMMARY	FEATURES									
	SOUND QUALITY									
	VALUE FOR MONEY									
	BUILD QUALITY									
	USABILITY									
OVERALL RATING										★★★★★