

ROUND UP

# Boost pedals

An essential bit of kit that is many things to many players

Words: Trevor Curwen Photography: Phil Barker

Adding a good boost pedal to your pedalboard is always a good idea, either for a simple increase in volume for a solo, a push to drive your amp (or overdrive pedal) harder, or simply to compensate for changing to a guitar with weaker pickups. But which boost pedal is right for you?

Besides considering how much you want to spend, the big question has to be, is do you want a boost that alters your basic tone? If you want one that does, there are options ranging from a fixed tonal shift such as a classic treble boost (it will actually lift upper mids), to various combinations of adjustable EQ, most notably in the mid-range areas that can get your tone singing.

To give you a little insight we've rounded up three boosts in different price brackets – budget, mid-range and premium – that also represent three different styles of boost. The TC Electronic Spark Mini provides boost only (with no advertised tonal change), the Dunlop Echoplex Preamp offers a boost that has a specific degree of EQ colouring, while the Suhr Koko Boost Reloaded provides adjustable EQ.

## The Rivals

### XOTIC EP BOOSTER £149

Also based on the preamp circuit from the Echoplex, the EP is a near-perfect 'always on' boost that gives amps a little extra juice in the mids

### ELECTRO-HARMONIX LPB-1 £39

Sophisticated it ain't, but if you're after an instant hike in volume at a very affordable price, this one's been doing the job since 1968

### ORANGE TWO-STROKE BOOST EQ £109

Another clever Adrian Emsley design, the Two-Stroke combines up to 12dB of boost with powerful tone sculpting EQ, fattening things up or adding clarity as you prefer



TC ELECTRONIC

## Spark Mini £75

VIDEO & AUDIO ► <http://bit.ly/guitaristextra>

The Spark mini is as simple as it gets. It's a pedalboard-friendly micro pedal with offset jacks and just one knob. Derived from the larger four-knob Spark pedal, which offers a useful set of tone-shaping options, this pedal uses a discrete analogue circuit to provide up to 20dB of clean boost. Kick it in and you'll get a boost that doesn't alter your tone too much, but has a slight treble enhancement, but has a range that goes from subtle lifts to enough kick to get a clean valve amp nicely raunchy.

That's all pretty straightforward but the Spark Mini has an impressive extra feature in its PrimeTime footswitch. This will turn the boost on or off with a normal swift push but will also deliver a momentary boost if you hold it down – great for emphasising certain passages within a solo or helping specific notes take off into harmonic feedback when you're just on the edge of that. **G**

**VERDICT** A simple boost in a small footprint – a low-cost enhancement for any pedalboard

## Tech Spec

**ORIGIN:** Thailand  
**TYPE:** Boost pedal  
**FEATURES:** True bypass, up to 20dB of boost  
**CONTROLS:** Level, Bypass footswitch  
**CONNECTIONS:** Standard input, standard output  
**POWER:** 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 40mA  
**DIMENSIONS:** 50 (w) x 93 (d) x 45 mm (h)

8/10



**MANUFACTURER**  
WESTSIDE DISTRIBUTION

**PRICE**  
£139

**MANUFACTURER**  
SUHR UK

**PRICE**  
£199

**MODEL**  
ECHOPLEX PREAMP

**CONTACT**  
08443262000/WWW.JIMDUNLOP.COM

**MODEL**  
KOKO BOOST RELOADED

**CONTACT**  
WWW.SUHR.COM



**DUNLOP**

## Echoplex Preamp £139

**VIDEO & AUDIO** ► <http://bit.ly/guitaristextra>

Before boost was readily available in stompbox form, some guitarists used other equipment to give a little extra lift to their amp. The Rangemaster treble boost was one favourite, while another option was to use an Echoplex EP-3 tape echo before your amp – but not necessarily with the echo effect engaged, as the EP-3's FET-based preamp had a tonal mojo of its own that attracted the likes of Jimmy Page and Eddie Van Halen.

This pedal aims to recreate that, manifesting itself, to our ears, as a positive shift in the tonal perspective, making guitar tone more focused and present, with a little grit thrown in, too. Boost takes place from about 1 o'clock on the knob and there's 11dB available, so while it's not going to turn a clean amp dirty, it still offers a juicy lift. While it's a practical tool for kicking in extra whoomph for solos, you might just want this pedal on permanently as a tonal enhancer. **G**

**VERDICT:** A prime candidate for an always-on pedal, this delivers tonal sweetening with boost if you need it

### Tech Spec

**ORIGIN:** USA  
**TYPE:** Preamp/  
Boost pedal  
**FEATURES:** True bypass,  
up to 11dB of boost  
**CONTROLS:** Gain, Bypass  
footswitch  
**CONNECTIONS:**  
Standard input,  
standard output  
**POWER:** 9V battery or 9V  
DC adaptor (not supplied)  
12mA  
**DIMENSIONS:** 63 (w) x  
110 (d) x 50mm (h)

**8/10**



**SUHR**

## Koko Boost Reloaded £199

**VIDEO & AUDIO** ► <http://bit.ly/guitaristextra>

Perhaps the best of both worlds, this pedal has two modes – clean and mid boost. These are both accessible from the same footswitch – you simply hold it down to change modes, the LED either lighting up green or red.

The clean boost is really transparent and, with a massive 26dB on tap, it should be enough for all conventional boosting needs. If you want a tonal shift, you have a choice of three different frequency ranges for the mid boosts as well as a Mid Q knob for a finer focus. This is where you want to be for coaxing more sustain out of an already driven amp. One frequency range focuses on the overall midrange, another emphasises lower mids to add increased girth to your boosts while the third will give you a high-mid boost for a tone that will cut through – not unlike a Tubescreamer's tonal focus but retaining the bass end. A truly classy pedal, which befits its premium tag. **G**

**VERDICT:** Versatility in a boost pedal – a clean or a tonally focused boost of your own choosing

### Tech Spec

**ORIGIN:** USA  
**TYPE:** Boost pedal  
**FEATURES:** Selectable  
true or buffered bypass,  
switchable modes, FX link  
external switching, low  
battery monitor, up to  
26dB of boost  
**CONTROLS:** Boost, Mid  
Boost, Mid Q, Freq switch,  
FX Link switch, bypass  
footswitch  
**CONNECTIONS:**  
Standard input, standard  
output, FX Link  
**POWER:** 9V-18V adaptor  
(not supplied) 15mA  
**DIMENSIONS:** 67 (w) x  
114 (d) x 47mm (h)

**Guitarist  
CHOICE**

**9/10**