

Quicktest

Coopersonic Tubecleaner **£109**

Valve-powered buffer and booster does it all with one knob

CONTACT: Coopersonic **PHONE:** 0115 917 8575 **WEB:** www.coopersonic.com

The **Tubecleaner** is designed for two functions – it can be used as both a booster and a buffer in your signal path. The buffer function, courtesy of a high impedance input and a low impedance output, is always on and can combat tone-sucking high frequency loss caused by some longer cables and pedals that don't have true bypass, by placing it in front of them. Boost, and its associated red LED, is implemented by the footswitch and there's 22dB of gain available.

Sounds

Featuring a single valve, the **Tubecleaner** comes with its own nine-volt DC 500mA power adaptor. Placed in front of an old Crybaby at the start of the signal chain it offers a definite tonal improvement, with more of the top end clearly coming through. Unity gain on the boost knob is at about 10 o'clock, so you can cut the signal as well as boost. But the boosting is probably where the **Tubecleaner** is going to earn its keep, as it can really push valve amps hard, resulting in loads more gain, dirt and sustain without messing with the tone. This provides a very natural route to overdrive, whether in place of an overdrive pedal or as an add-on to get more out of one.

Verdict

If you want to improve the sound of your signal chain while having the facility to kick the whole thing up a notch at will, the **Tubecleaner** will do just that. **[TC]**

The Bottom Line

We like: The simplicity; ability to drive amps harder
We dislike: Another PSU to clutter up the pedalboard

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Electro-Harmonix Neo Clone **£65**

The legendary Small Clone chorus gets even smaller..

CONTACT: Various UK stores, including Macari's **PHONE:** 0207 836 2856 **WEB:** www.ehx.com



Thanks to Kurt Cobain, the **Small Clone** chorus has long been one of E-HX's most revered stompboxes. Unlike the **Nano Clone**, which due to its lack of a depth switch can never quite get that classic wobble, this **Neo** version aims to provide the genuine effect in the same **Nano**-sized housing. It employs the same basic circuitry as the **Small Clone**, and E-HX states that the electronics have also been "massaged and tweaked to improve accuracy and offer superior sonic qualities".

The screen-printed livery here is its customary rough and ready self and controls comprise a single rate knob plus a micro switch that provides two intensities of depth; heavy and light.

Sounds

Some E-HX units have a well-earned reputation as being over-the-top sound generators, but it's possible to obtain more subtle tones. That's certainly the case here – if you set the rate to 10 o'clock with a light depth, any clean tone will reap the benefit. The heavier depth setting is more in Andy Summers and vintage Alex Lifeson territory, with plenty of warm vintage shimmer on tap.

We authentically recreated the classic **Come As You Are** modulation with the rate set around 12 o'clock and a heavy depth – increasing the rate just adds to the **Soundgarden**-style movement without really getting too far out of control.

Verdict

It's as close to the original **Small Clone** as makes no difference and, best of all, should fit snugly onto your existing pedalboard. There's an ever-increasing choice of weird and wonderful E-HX pedals available these days, but make sure you check this one out. **[SB]**

The Bottom Line

We like: The authentic sound; price; size
We dislike: No battery compartment

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Mackie Onyx Blackjack £149

Guitarist
CHOICE

A quality compact USB audio interface

CONTACT: Loud Technologies PHONE: 01494 557398 WEB: www.mackie.com

Mackie is well known for its mixing desks, several of which are equipped with its respected and high-quality Onyx mic preamps. Now, while a mixing desk might not be an essential part of computer recording these days, decent mic preamps in the signal chain will help you record the best possible signal, so Mackie has introduced the Blackjack, a two-channel USB interface built around a pair of Onyx preamps. Exceptionally rugged and fitted with Neutrik combi sockets, the Blackjack will take signals from any microphone as well as being able to take a Hi-Z signal direct from a guitar or bass. USB bus-powered, the Blackjack features separate volume controls for

both its monitor and headphone outputs.

In Use

Dead easy to use, whether recording in stereo or mono, the Blackjack will let you capture audio from your guitar or microphone onto your computer, while clearly monitoring what you're playing or singing. An input monitor knob routes the analogue signal directly from the preamps to the monitoring outputs so you can eliminate any latency delay by mixing the signal in proportion with what's coming back from computer. The Onyx preamps combined with Cirrus Logic converters ensure a pristine signal path for



recording the optimum sound into your DAW.

Verdict

With excellent sound and build quality, the Onyx Blackjack is a solid performer that won't let you down. [TC]

The Bottom Line

We liked: Ease of installation; choice of models
We disliked: Nothing

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Vox AC1RV £59.99

A desktop amp that's got rhythm

CONTACT: Korg UK PHONE: 01908 857100 WEB: www.voxamps.com

This tabletop combo not only offers authentic livery but also a choice of 66 onboard rhythm patterns. We're staunch fans of the Vox AmPlugs and the base tones here, optimistically described as overdrive and clean, do owe some of their tone to those headphone amps.

The rhythm patterns are split into 11 styles, including blues, country, 16-beat and so on, and each offers six variations that can be further augmented by a manual tempo control.

Power comes from six AA batteries, which will give up to 26 hours of continuous use, or an optional power supply.

Sounds

The gain, volume and tone pots do allow for a certain amount of tone-shaping, and there's certainly plenty of dirt on hand for a reasonably satisfying playing experience, whether using headphones or the

internal pair of three-inch speakers.

While easy to use and varied, the drums themselves possess that unpleasant Bontempi organ character that's unlikely to appeal for any length of time, and we found the clean channel to be anything but.

Verdict

Although the modest price would make it an inexpensive purchase, it's difficult to imagine anyone dispensing with, for example, GarageBand in favour of the amp section here when a warm up or practice session is required. In these days of open-ended guitar software, and their ease of installation onto laptops and even smartphones, is there even a place for the AC1RV? Arguably this is one for technophobes only. [SB]



The Bottom Line

We like: Choice of rhythm patterns; cool livery; price
We disliked: Poor drum tones

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★