

Quicktest

MXR CSP265 Joe Bonamassa FET Driver £189

Drive time with JoBo

CONTACT: Westside Distribution PHONE: 0141 248 4812 WEB: www.jimdunlop.com



Following in the footsteps of the Dunlop JB95 Cry Baby and JBF3 Fuzz Face is the MXR FET Driver, which is based on Joe Bonamassa's favourite Chandler Tube Driver, as made famous by David Gilmour and Eric Johnson.

The FET Driver pedal is designed to thicken up lead playing, and its tones range from soft clipping to light distortion. Control-wise, the level and drive knobs act as you'd expect, while the hi and low knobs cut or boost treble and bass frequencies, and the hi cut switch rounds off high frequencies. Elsewhere, the pedal is true bypass and runs

from a nine-volt battery or power supply.

Sounds

With a smooth, singing, Gilmour-esque sustain, the FET Driver certainly sounds the part. In fact, crank up the gain and it's so smooth that it begins to verge on fuzz territory, in contrast to the crunchy low-gain sounds. The pedal's natural-sounding dirt also blends beautifully with amp overdrive for meaty lead tones – just the way Bonamassa likes it. And if your living room drive doesn't quite translate to the stage, press the handy hi cut switch and you'll tone down the top end to prevent shrill treble at gig volumes.

Verdict

It's not the cheapest overdrive on the shelf, but Bonamassa and MXR got this one right, with a great range of sounds and a natural-sounding overdrive that suits both clean and dirty amps. If the usual drives aren't doing it for you, a visit to the FET might well be in order. **[MB]**

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: A pricey but worthwhile overdrive that suits both clean and dirty amps, especially for blues leads



Line 6 Sonic Port £69

Guitar to iPad connection

CONTACT: Line 6 PHONE: 01788 566566 WEB: www.line6.com

Line 6 has previously released a device for connecting guitar and iOS called the Mobile In, which we found came unplugged from the 30-pin port a little too easily. The new Sonic Port, however, offers a much more solid link because it sits solidly on a flat surface and connects to your device with either the supplied 30-pin or Lightning cables, offering 24-bit/48kHz audio quality and 110dB dynamic range on the guitar input.

In Use

Perfect for GarageBand and any other CoreAudio music apps, the Sonic Port also comes with an associated app – Line 6's Mobile POD, which offers 32 amps, 16 effects and 16 speaker cabinets, over 10,000 preset sounds and a music player so you can play along to songs from your iTunes library. It also integrates with the free Jammit app, giving you the correct sounds for Jammit songs. This app isolates

individual audio tracks within original master recordings and lets you see the notation and tab so it's an excellent learning tool. You do have to buy individual songs, though.

Guitar and stereo line inputs, plus headphone and stereo line outputs, ensure that the Sonic Port can take care of numerous scenarios in connecting instrument and iOS. The line out is a huge bonus in that you can use the tones on your device and play through studio monitoring, a PA or even your guitar amp.

Verdict

The Sonic Port's app integration and connectivity options have upped the game for guitar to iOS connection. **[TC]**

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: It might lack a USB connection and input gain control, but the sound quality, connectivity options and Mobile POD app make it a great choice



Seagull Excursion Natural Folk SG £349

North American guitars are getting cheaper...

CONTACT: 440 Distribution PHONE: 01132 589599 WEB: www.godinguitars.com

In a modern world where the 'correct' specification is all-important, along comes something this writer hasn't played for some years: an all-laminate acoustic guitar. No

solid wood top? This new three-guitar mini range (there's also a smaller parlour and bigger dreadnought) lowers the entry point into the well-respected Seagull range, which is made in

Canada and part of Robert Godin's impressive empire.

As you'd expect, it's a bit of a plain Jane, but there's admirable figuring to the three-ply wild cherry top and back, but with no edge binding whatsoever. Silver leaf maple is used for the chunky, well-shaped neck, which is topped off with a dark rosewood 'board with nicely rounded top edges and well seated and fettled medium gauge frets. To give the model a rather rural character, the place of origin writing around the soundhole (Princeville, Québec) and the head logo are burn-

stamped. That's what some cowboys would call branding!

Sounds

With a spacious nut width of 43.7mm, this folk-size model is perfect for fingerstyle and no slouch as a strummer. It's comfortable played seated, too, but the impressive thing is its characterful and pokey sound. Less wide and pristine than a spruce/rosewood mid body instrument, it proves a powerful blues guitar that loves slide and open tunings. Odd as it may sound, it also does a very good flat-top impersonation of an all maple laminate 'jazz' archtop.

Verdict

For the acoustic blues and even jazz player, this is a great choice – a very affordable and characterful acoustic. [DB]

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: We're told solid is best – not always the case, as this powerful lil' Seagull proves

Providence DBS-1 Dual Bass Station £333

Fantastic sound options when using one or two basses

CONTACT: GuitarXS PHONE: 01227 832558 WEB: www.providence-ltd.com

You often need more than one bass sound on a gig and the Dual Bass Station is purpose-built for the job. This compact preamp lets you select two different preset EQ settings when using one bass, or switch sounds between two instruments. Optimising the sounds between fretted and fretless basses – or the nightmare idiosyncrasies between bass guitar and upright bass – has suddenly become a whole lot easier to change to in a hurry. Even if you use both active and passive instruments you can get a well-balanced sound between the two. It also has a mute button, so when a tuner is plugged into the

appropriate jack socket you can still tune in silence.

Sounds

There's plenty of tonal adjustment – each channel is equipped with bass, middle and treble controls with cut and boost available either side of the centre detent. Each channel also has a mid frequency adjuster, so you can really shift those mids for some exceptional sound differences. Although rich in bottom end and solid top frequencies, the pedal avoids booming sub bass or piercing extremities, and since each channel also has its own master volume there's also the general



boost factor to consider. This will add new life to your sound and all with noiseless operation.

Verdict

Tone and balanced sounds are the most important factors for any bass player and the Dual Bass Station offers fantastic control with the means to retain two personalised sounds. [RN]

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: If you use two different basses or need an optional sound/boost for your solo bass, this is the pedal



Eventide H9 £489

Eventide's greatest hits in one box

CONTACT: Source Distribution **PHONE:** 020 8962 5080 **WEB:** www.eventide.com

Objects of many a guitarist's desire, Eventide's stompboxes the ModFactor, PitchFactor, TimeFactor and Space respectively focus on modulation, pitch, delay and reverb effects. The not-inexpensive pedals are large with loads of knobs and, by their very nature, specialised. If you were really interested in getting deep into any of those particular effects genres, one of the pedals could be a sound investment, but for many of us, a smaller, easily operated pedal featuring a range of Eventide effects across the four genres would present a more practical option. The H9 offers just that...

Here is a pedal that can actually run all of Eventide's stompbox effects (apart from the TimeFactor's Looper). All of

the effect algorithms (including their associated presets) are available for purchase at £13.99 a shot, but several come already built in – you get Chorus and Tremolo/Pan from the ModFactor, H910/H949 and Crystals from the PitchFactor, Tape Echo and Vintage Delay from the TimeFactor, and Shimmer and Hall from Space. In addition, there's a new UltraTap Delay that's exclusive to the H9, plus a voucher for a free algorithm of your choice.

The H9 contains 99 presets based on the available algorithms and these are easily called up via a combination of footswitch presses or the large data encoder. After the excessive knobage of the other Eventide pedals, the H9's interface has been kept

impressively simple with just five buttons and the encoder. Three of the buttons (X, Y and Z) allow quick onstage tweaks of the top three parameters of any preset, while the Hotknob button is an instant alternative to plugging an expression pedal into the rear panel socket – each preset's character can be altered by either.

In Use

The complex effects algorithms feature loads of editable parameters. The H9 has both wireless (Bluetooth) and wired (USB) connections for the free H9 Control editor and librarian software (iOS app, Mac, Windows) for editing, creating and managing presets, changing system settings and purchasing algorithms. This pedal has been designed to take full advantage of this and it works brilliantly, especially so on an iPad where a few finger swipes zap the pedal through thin air to produce instant results.

With stereo or mono operation available, the H9 offers plenty of connection

options and the included effects cover a useful range that could be enough for many users without having to buy any more algorithms. Of course, the great thing is that you can buy just the ones that you want, so if you liked the BlackHole sound from the Space but didn't want to spring for the whole unit, now's your chance...

Eventide effects are derived from a long line of studio processors, they're detailed and classy and can head off in sonic directions lesser processors can only dream of. Other one-effect-at-a-time 'chameleon' pedals exist out there, but the H9 pushes the genre's envelope.

Verdict

It was never going to be cheap but it's the right pedal for your 'board if you want to add a wide-ranging sprinkling of Eventide fairy dust to your sound. **[TC]**

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: A 'multi-effect' that's upgradeable, compact and has iOS control. Superb!

Vigier Excalibur Special Limited Edition £2,339

Just add aluminium for a truly metal finish

CONTACT: High Tech Distribution **PHONE:** 01722 410002 **WEB:** vigierguitars.com

We've reviewed a healthy number of Excalibur models over the years – seven since our 1994 look at the Standard – and we've always been struck by the high build quality, the overall vibe and a neck so tactile that playing it could result in a bandmate placing an anonymous call to a tabloid.

What sets this limited edition apart from the standard spec is its aluminium finish. Details on exactly how it's applied are scarce, but it appears that a sheet of aluminium foil is placed on the surface of the maple top and then finished off with a layer of lacquer. Four colours are available – black, green and blue alongside this purple option – and each is matched by a mirrored scratchplate of the same hue.

Up close, you can easily see the sheet's texture – it's not smooth but is almost as if it's been scrunched like a piece of paper before application. It certainly looks striking and we're sure that stage lights will multiply the effect.

Elsewhere, it's business as usual and, as ever with Vigier guitars, we're surprised its wares don't appear in many more exalted pairs of hands. Pickups comprise an HSS configuration of DiMarzios: a Tone Zone in the bridge, a PAF Pro in the neck, and a centrally mounted FS-1 single coil.

The feel of the bolt-on maple neck, reinforced by graphite, is the ideal middle ground between comforting girth and unrestricting skinniness, and the rosewood fingerboard bears 24 stainless steel frets plus a 'Marmite' zero fret. Vigier points out that, if you can't live with such a feature, it is removable, but we can't say

we've ever had much of an issue with zero frets. If it's good enough for Brian May...

Sounds

The Tone Zone is an Alnico V 'bucker that aims to bridge the tonal gap between high output and a warmer, more dynamic feel, and this it does well. It might be a little too toppy for some, but we enjoyed our time riffing away and found that the tone pot can help to calm the treble performance. There's certainly sufficient bass-end balls to give rock riffs impact.

We'd suggest the single coil may be a tad too gnarly for blues purists – the twang-to-zing ratio isn't really in their favour – but muted clean chops and single notes fly from the guitar with unbridled gusto: it's fun, which is as it should be.

There's not much in the way of warm soup from the PAF Pro, rather an open vintage flavour that's embellished by a more modern urgency that we're sure will appeal to instrumentalists.

Verdict

With a perfect setup and arguably one of the most efficient refinements of a traditional vibrato system available today, the Excalibur is as playable as it's always been. The modern sonic performance will surely appeal to the current crop of fret-melters, and, with the aluminium finish, Vigier has successfully addressed any guitar's most important feature: what it looks like. **[SB]**

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: Whether you shred, funk or rock, make sure this eye-popping modern classic doesn't pass you by

