





Ibanez RGKP6 £319

The Japanese shred veteran equips the RG outline with a Korg Kaoss Pad, putting 100 effects at guitarists' fingertips for little over £300. But is it future perfect?

WORDS **Michael Brown** PHOTOGRAPHY **Joby Sessions**

What We Want To Know

- 1 What's that screen doing there?**
It's a Korg Mini Kaoss Pad 2S: an effects processor, sample recorder and audio player, aimed originally at DJs but equally usable across a range of instruments, including guitar.
- 2 This isn't a new idea, though, is it?**
Well, Muse's Matt Bellamy has been playing X/Y pad-loaded custom electrics for years, but this is the first guitar to put the tech in the hands of cash-strapped mortals.
- 3 What are all those knobs for, then?**
The RGKP6 packs tone and gain controls, plus an on/off switch for the guitar's built-in distortion circuit, which runs before the MKP2S in the signal chain, and helps to drive the Kaoss Pad's effects for an extra dose of compression and sustain.

Over the past decade of electric guitar production, a few brave manufacturers have injected their instruments with tech that goes beyond the regular hardware fare (see p102 for a small selection) and guitarists have paid a premium in the process. Ibanez and Korg are the latest names to sign up to this technologically enhanced

list – the Ibanez RG series provides the outline, while the Korg Mini Kaoss Pad 2S delivers the tech – but in a noted departure from convention, the RGKP6 is more affordable than many of the more conventional guitars we regularly feature.

But don't let the price tag fool you: the Mini Kaoss Pad 2S packs 100 effects, comprising filters, modulation, LFO, delay,

The Rivals

The most obvious point of comparison is the **Manson MB-1S Matthew Bellamy Signature**, which comes fitted with a custom Manson MIDI controller, but with prices starting at £3,703, it's a very different market. The **Misa Tri-Bass** features a touch-sensitive screen and neck, but no strings – it's only available direct from the company, for \$649 (£412) plus shipping

reverb, a looper, a vocoder and synth/sound effects, plus – with the use of a micro SD card – the ability to record and sample your playing for playback and triggering of effects. The effects are navigated using the value



The RGKP6's Wizard-aping neck is a fast and comfortable player



You'll need to fit the Korg Mini Kaoss Pad 2S to the guitar's dock yourself



These switches control distortion and take the Pad in and out of the signal path

slider, while the tap tempo button dials in effects rates, the hold button freezes the current sound and the play button plays back recorded or stored sounds.

The guitar itself also includes a built-in distortion circuit, positioned ahead of the MKP2S in the signal chain, which allows you to drive the Pad's effects. The distortion is controlled by an on/off switch, plus tone and gain knobs at the base of the guitar, while the switch nearest the Pad takes it in and out of the signal path, and the adjacent knob controls overall guitar and Pad master volume. An additional mini-jack headphone output for amp-free playing rounds off the RGKP6's unique feature set.

Given the low price tag, it's unsurprising that a number of

compromises have been undertaken in order to keep costs down.

The RGKP6 has just the one pickup (a stacked IBZ-KP humbucker), no selector switch, no tone control and a no-frills black finish. The Kaoss Pad isn't quite as integrated as you might think, either; the guitar is shipped without the Pad installed, revealing a substantial rout on the treble side, housing a plastic dock, plus two short cables. A boxed Korg Mini Kaoss Pad 2S is included with the guitar, but it's up to you to fit it by removing the unit's back, clipping the Pad into the guitar's dock and connecting the cables to the headphones and line-in jacks. It's a little rudimentary, but it does the job – and it's certainly preferable to the

alternative of gaffer-taping a Pad to your guitar and drilling the holes yourself.

Sounds

Since the Mini Kaoss Pad 2S was originally aimed at DJs, some sounds are more applicable to guitar than others. The Slicer's tremolo chop, the manual phasers and flangers, and various filters make perfect sense, offering the ability to manipulate the depth and intensity of the sound via the touchpad. However, pressing the hold button freezes the currently selected sound,

meaning you don't have to touch the pad at all, essentially transforming the MKP2S into a traditional multi-effects unit. With a micro SD card inserted, you can also record short sections of playing as samples for triggering and looping, and even load up your own tracks to jam over – but since the RGKP6 combines the Pad and guitar output into one signal, you'll have to run the backing through your amp.

The less, ahem, conventional sounds are a mixed bag. The various loopers – which sample a split-second of your playing

Freezing reverbs and delays make for atmospheric intros. Then there's the pure noisemaking territory...



<http://bit.ly/guitarist390>



The RGKP6's fixed hardtail bridge keeps things stable while you wreak sonic havoc

for pad-adjustable stutters and glitches – are great fun for (whisper it) dubstep and dance crossovers, while freezing reverbs and delays make for atmospheric intros and middle eights.

Then there's the pure noisemaking territory via vocoders and synths, which rely on your pad finger for pitch rather than your fretting hand. Pressing the exact same spot on the pad to maintain the correct pitch is easier said than done, though, making these sounds somewhat difficult to use in a musical context.

It's also frustrating that only three of the 100 presets can be assigned to the value slider for instant access, making live use potentially problematic. And with no individual adjustable

parameters for each effect, the MKP2S isn't hugely customisable, either.

Amid all the Kaoss, it's easy to forget about the guitar itself. While our review model could have done with a truss rod adjustment, its sleek Wizard-aping neck is as shred-ready as they come, with a typically flat radius'd rosewood fingerboard, primed for swift legato. The stacked humbucker's moderate output makes it better suited to both clean and distorted tones than many of Ibanez's higher-output humbuckers, although we would have liked at least a tone control to smooth out the top-end on cleans. That said, the Kaoss Pad likes a consistent signal, and in conjunction with the somewhat metallic distortion circuit – don't go

throwing away your drive pedals just yet – the stacked humbucker certainly serves its purpose.

Verdict

Like the technologically enhanced models that came before it, the RGKP6 is as divisive as guitars get. It requires you to comprehensively adjust your mindset to accommodate an entirely new approach to the guitar, but if you are willing to experiment you'll find a wealth of inspirational sounds. It's not the most flexible solution for getting guitar-meets-DJ sounds, nor is it the most elegant, but it's certainly the most affordable – and that alone makes it well worthy of your attention. **G**



Ibanez RGKP6

PRICE: £319

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Double-cutaway solidbody electric with additional rout and cabling to accommodate Korg Mini Kaoss Pad 2S (included)

BODY: Mahogany

NECK: Maple

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

NUT/WIDTH: Plastic/43mm (1.69")

FINGERBOARD: Rosewood with 400mm (15.75") radius

FRETS: 24, jumbo

HARDWARE: Fixed bridge – Cosmo Black

STRING SPACING: 53mm/2.09"

ELECTRICS: One IBZ-KP stacked humbucker; master volume for guitar and MKP2S, Mini Kaoss Pad 2S on/bypass switch; distortion on/off, distortion tone, distortion gain

EFFECTS: 100 (15 filters, 15 modulation, 20 LFO, 10 delay, 5 reverb, 20 looper, 5 vocoder, 10 synth/sound effect)

POWER: RGKP6: 9V battery; Korg Mini Kaoss Pad 2S: 2x AA batteries, 4.5V power supply (not included)

WEIGHT (KG/LB): 2.6/5.73

LEFT HANDERS: No

FINISHES: Black only

Headstock Distribution

0121 508 6666

www.ibanez.co.jp

OVERALL RATING ★★★★★

Build quality ★★★★★

Playability ★★★★★

Sound ★★★★★

Value for money ★★★★★

Guitarist says: While flawed in some areas, this is a brave attempt to reinvent the guitar, at a price most can afford

Special effects

The RGKP6 is the latest in a long line of effects-laden electrics – here are a few of our faves from years gone by...

1 Vox Phantom VI Special

The Phantom line was expanded throughout the 60s to include the Special, as played by Joy Division's Ian Curtis. It came with six onboard effects, activated via pickguard-mounted buttons: treble boost, bass boost, top boost, mid boost, fuzz and repeat, while there were also controls for mid boost frequency, fuzz sustain, repeat speed and volume – it could even sound an E for tuning!

2 Guyatone LG-23R

Built in the early 70s, the LG-23R looked like most common-or-garden Strat-a-likes, but with one key difference: a built-in drum machine, with five patterns chosen via a rotary selector and start switch, while volume and tempo controls fine-tuned the rhythms.

3 Electra MPC X320 (modular powered circuits)

In 1976, while the guitar effects biz was just beginning, Japanese brand Electra was offering guitarists the ability to load their instruments with them, courtesy of its modular effects system – you'd simply slot one of the 12 available cartridge-style modules into your guitar, activate its switch and adjust the intensity with the effect knob.

4 Alesis X Guitar

When it launched in 2005, the X Guitar sold for only £229, and included 40 digital effects derived from the Alesis GuitarFX multi-effects unit. An extra set of controls on the side of the guitar scrolled between sounds and adjusted parameters, and you could plug in an expression pedal for real-time control.

5 Gibson Firebird X

Even without the added effects, Gibson's 2011 innovation was divisive – following in the dubious footsteps of the active-circuitry RD Artist of the 1970s. As well as auto-tuning, comprehensive pickup switching and a piezo acoustic mode, the X offered a comprehensive assortment of DSP effects, all adjustable via onboard faders.



