

# Boss RE-20 Space Echo | £152

The FX boffins at Boss have been hard at work recreating the sound of Roland's classic Space Echo. **Dan 'JD73' Goldman** gets lost in space



ON THE DVD

## WHAT IS IT?

Boss' new COSM-modelled recreation of the classic Roland RE-201 Space Echo in guitarist-friendly desktop/stomp box format

## CONTACT

Who: Roland UK  
Tel: +44 (0)1792 702701  
Web: [roland.com](http://roland.com)

## HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 Super portable, tough and uncluttered design
- 2 Faithful recreation of the Space Echo sound
- 3 Dedicated tap tempo pedal and expression pedal inputs

**W**ith demand still high on the second-hand market for classic tape-based Space

Echos, it was only a matter of time before Roland's own FX division, Boss, got around to remaking their classic for the noughties. Many producers will testify to this day that there's a certain mojo in the sound of the original Space Echo units that has not yet been matched. That is until now...

First impressions of the RE-20 are positive. Straight out of the box it feels sturdy and has a reassuring weight (thankfully a lot lighter than the originals!). The pedal's main body is made from tough metal and covered with a textured granite-effect finish, which should stand up well to prolonged stage use and abuse. The dual pedals are made from the same tough material and covered in thick rubber similar to other Boss guitar

stomp boxes; it doesn't feel like any corners have been cut on the build-quality front.

The interface may be simple but there are also a number of clever and stylish design cues that hark back to the original RE-201 and instantly transport the user back in time to 1974 (when the 201 was launched). These include the green colour used on the control panel, the peak level indicator and the mode selector dial.

## Gimmicks are good

One other feature that seems gimmicky at first but is actually very useful is the red tape speed indicator. It's great to be able to tell at a glance how fast the repeats are before you play in a dark environment (and the light is reminiscent of the light on the front of *Knight Rider's* KITT!)

All the controls are nicely spaced out and have a reassuring feel; there are eight dials in total. The top row includes the EQ controls and reverb volume. The bottom row includes repeat rate, intensity and echo volume controls. To the right of these is the familiar mode selector where the type



of repeats is selected, and this is also where you select just the echo, the spring reverb emulation, or echo and reverb together. To the right of this is the input volume control that can be driven harder to saturate the virtual tape. Underneath are the two controls for the pedals.

### Pedal to the metal

The left pedal toggles effect on/off and the right pedal is a tap tempo control for easily tapping in the speed of the repeats with your foot. Further to this, the tap tempo pedal can also access what Boss calls the 'twist' function where the intensity rate and repeat rate are simultaneously increased to create distorted sonic mayhem.

I love using this effect on my SRE-555 but the beauty of the RE-20 is that it can be done by holding the pedal down for a few seconds instead of having to have both hands on the controls – which is no good if you're trying to play your instrument at the same time! It seems that a lot of thought has been put into the RE-20 to ensure it really is a great live/studio performance box.



The wow and flutter is faithfully recreated and there's an inherent randomness in the sound (such as wobbly repeats and subtle chorusing), which adds to this authenticity and tapey-ness. I was dubious at first but this really is as close as you'll get to an original RE-201.

The sound of the input saturation is also faithful and if you closed your eyes you'd be hard pushed to tell between the RE-20 and the RE-201. The controls react in the same way as the original, although the original still

Now for the drawbacks. First off, having an input level meter would be useful. Also, when using the input level control with low output instruments such as a Rhodes, I found that the available gain level was a little on the low side and that the saturation only really came into play with the input volume set almost at maximum.

### EQ issues

The biggest problem I found is in 'reverb only' mode. For some reason the EQ controls become disabled. This is a shame as I find it's really useful to be able to EQ the reverb's sound. I also found that, in general, the saturation sounds a bit more brittle

and harsh compared to the original.

It's also a shame that a) the direct signal on/off switch is on the back as it's sometimes really handy to have the option to switch modes on the fly and b) that the longer delay mode can only be accessed by powering the unit off.

Finally there's no sound-on-sound mode but the RE-201 didn't have that anyway! But those niggles aside, it's a very impressive piece of gear. **FM**

## Boss have nailed the character of the original RE-201 both on the echo and spring reverb front

So how does it sound? In a word: 'authentic.' As a long-time owner of Roland's flagship SRE-555 Chorus Echo I'd say that Boss have nailed the character of the original RE-201 both on the echo and spring reverb front.

sounds dirtier and warmer to my ears. Roland's COSM technology has paid dividends in this unit – not least because there's no mechanical noise, chance of motors failing or background hiss, even at high gain levels.

### The Roland Space Echo: a short history

The Boss RE-20 is closely modelled on the Roland RE-201 tape-based Space Echo originally launched in 1974.

The launch of the Space Echo came very early on in Roland's history (two years after the company was established) but it soon cemented itself as a must-have FX unit in pro studios and on stage for guitarists and keyboardists alike (not to mention many a Dub artist!).

The RE-201 was preceded by the now rare RE-100/1 and RE200 Space Echo machines, which were both very similar but with different VU meters and a shorter tape loop.

These were only in production for about a year before the 201 hit



the market. Roland continued to update and improve their design, adding their classic chorus unit, balanced ins/outs/XLR connections and the sound-on-sound features to the range through the RE-301, RE-501 and SRE-555 rackmount models. An interesting but little-known fact is that the Space Echos were still being made up until 1990 – it's a real testament to their popularity.

### SPECS

#### Controls

Eight rotary function pots  
Rear-mounted direct sound on/off switch  
Peak level indicator

#### Connections

Two quarter-inch jack inputs and two quarter-inch jack outputs. Full stereo in/stereo out capability or can be used mono only. Control of repeat rate, intensity, echo level and 'twist' function via optional EV-5 expression pedal

#### Power

Six AA batteries or optional 9V Roland PSA series power adaptor

#### Dimensions

173 x 158 x 57mm

#### Weight

1.2kg

### ALTERNATIVES



**Moog 104Z delay pedal**  
**£330**

Perhaps the Holy Grail of analogue delay pedals. It's not tape-based but has a funky and unique sound all of its own.

[moogmusic.com](http://moogmusic.com)



**Blue Coconut Unity Echo Verb**  
**£1,880**

Highly spec'd and pricey but could be the tape echo to own in the near future.

[unityaudio.co.uk](http://unityaudio.co.uk)

FutureMusic	VERDICT
BUILD	★★★★★
VALUE	★★★★★
EASE OF USE	★★★★★
VERSATILITY	★★★★★
RESULTS	★★★★★
Boss have created an authentic, tough and portable alternative to the ageing Space Echo.	