

CARL MARTIN AC-TONE £189

EFFECTS  GUITARIST INTERACTIVE

PHOTOGRAPHY SIMON LEES

The AC-Tone offers a flexible palette of overdrive sounds

Carl Martin AC-Tone £189

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PRICE: £189

ORIGIN: Denmark

TYPE: Overdrive pedal

FEATURES: Three channels of drive/boost

CONTROLS: Boost, volume, cut, gain two, gain one

CONNECTIONS: In, out

MIDI: No

POWER: Built-in mains power

OPTIONS: None

First Line

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For such a small country, the Danish effects industry seems to be flourishing. Carl Martin specialises in getting the best from classic guitar tones by [Adrian Clark](#)

We looked at Carl Martin's Plexitone pedal back in issue 261, and were impressed by the huge number of high-quality Marshall-style overdrive sounds it could produce. The AC-Tone takes a similar approach, but with a sonic nod of the head towards another classic British valve amp, the Vox AC30.

The layout of the AC-Tone is pretty much the same as that of the Plexitone. Working from the right hand side, the first footswitch turns the overdrive circuit on and off, while the second selects between the two independent drive channels. The third footswitch turns the independent clean boost effect on and off; this can be used on its own or in combination with either of the drive channels. All three pedals are clearly marked with bright blue LEDs.

Once you understand the footswitch layout, the five controls are easy to figure out. Each of the two drive channels has its own gain control, and the master volume control adjusts the overall level of both channels. The separate boost function isn't affected by the master volume, but it has its own independent gain control. Tone shaping

CARL MARTIN AC-TONE	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

■ **WE LIKED** Very flexible; good, focused tone

■ **WE DISLIKED** The on/off 'select' LED is slightly misleading

for the drive channels is provided by a simple 'cut' control, familiar to anyone who has used a real AC30.

Apart from that, there's just one input and one output, and power is mains-only. In common with some of the other Carl Martin pedals, there's a welcome lack of a flimsy external power supply – just a good, sturdy mains cable.

SOUNDS: The ability of a pedal to sound like a particular amp is always going to be affected by the sound of the

amp you plug it into. With that in mind, we weren't expecting to achieve a perfect likeness of an AC30, but wanted to see whether that amp's general characteristics could be imposed upon any amp.

Bearing in mind that the Plexitone produced several convincing versions of the 'Marshall sound', we were impressed to discover that the AC-Tone differs from that pedal exactly as we'd hoped. The bass response is lighter and tighter and there's a fatter mid-range

element to the sound, which can then be sharpened by careful use of the cut control. Both drive channels produce the same sound (with the same cut setting) but the dual gain controls have plenty of

range, so it's easy to set up clean, crunch and lead sounds, or whatever you need.

Further flexibility is added by the boost function, which can provide up to ➔

If you're looking for a flexible selection of overdrive sounds with generous amounts of mid-range and a tight bass response, the AC-Tone is definitely worth a demo



→ 20dB of additional boost. Think about it – you can add boost to your clean amp sound or to either of the two drive channels. Including ‘off’, that’s a total of six sounds – enough to cover most people’s level-balancing requirements, we’d guess! Used on its own the boost function can really kick some life into a clean valve amp, while in conjunction with the drive channels, there’s enough gain on tap for most applications. Combining high-gain and boost settings results in a pleasantly degraded fuzz

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tone... plenty of bite and aggression, but with a very smooth top end.

Furthermore, you don’t have to use the AC-Tone to increase the volume of your basic amp sound. Unity gain seems to be around 20 per cent on the dual gain controls, so there’s a modest

amount of scope for dialling in lower-gain sounds if necessary.

Verdict

We only have one real criticism, and that was the same with the Plexitone. All three footswitches have simple on/off LEDs, and while that works perfectly well for the drive and boost switches, it’s a bit misleading for the select switch. It would be nice to have a two-colour LED, to emphasise that you’re selecting drive 1 or drive 2, rather than on or off.

Apart from that, this is a great-sounding pedal. Don’t be misled by the name – although its tone does resemble that of the Vox AC30, the name seems to be just a general indication of the tonal characteristics. If you’re looking for a selection of overdrive sounds with generous amounts of mid-range and a tight bass response, the AC-Tone is definitely worth a demo. Carl Martin pedals always avoid unnecessary bells and whistles in favour of doing the simple jobs very well indeed. 

Carl Martin AC-Tone

Guitarist RATING



The rivals

CARL MARTIN AC-TONE	
Line 6 Crunchtone	£78
HAO Rumble Mod	£150
Fulltone Fulldrive2	£199

Overdrive pedals used to be so simple, but manufacturers have started squeezing more and more into them. Line 6, with its digital modelling technology, are the masters of this and the Crunchtone has three different overdrive sounds to choose from. The HAO pedal is very flexible, inspired by the sound of Dumble amps, and the Fulldrive is one of the most respected ‘boutique’ pedals on the market.

The dual gain controls have plenty of range for crunch and lead sounds

