

TC Electronic Nova System, NR-1 Nova Reverb & NDY-1 Nova Dynamics

£477, £241 & £241

Super Novas - we look at the new stars in TC Electronic's guitar effects universe *by Trevor Curwen*

No stranger to quality guitar effects, Danish company TC Electronic has produced an array of both individual stompboxes and larger multi-effects floor processors for several years – the latest Nova range offers both types. The flagship is the Nova System, a seemingly bombproof multi-effects processor with eight footswitches and seven categories of switchable effect. If a multi-effects box isn't your thing, however, then some similar effects are also available in a series of Nova pedals – they include: Repeater, Drive, Modulator, Delay (reviewed in

issue 295), plus the Reverb and Dynamics we have here.

Nova System

The Nova System looks like it's designed to take plenty of stage abuse without flinching. It's mains-powered via an IEC cable, so there are no messy wall warts and the socketry offers plenty of potential for different usages. Besides the guitar input, there's a line input to allow use in an amp's effects loop, while the output can be stereo or mono. S/PDIF digital I/O is provided, as are MIDI in, out and thru sockets, while a 'pedal in' socket allows the connection of an expression

pedal or TC's G-Switch. The easy-action footswitches are arranged in two sets of four, one set higher than the other for uncluttered operation. When any one is active it's surrounded by a red glow, so you know exactly what your status is. The Tap Tempo switch flashes constantly in time. The large backlit LCD clearly displays patch names and parameters – flanked by four soft knobs for quick editing. Calling up effects and parameters is facilitated by several soft rubber switches.

The Nova System offers a series of effects modules in a chain. Seven of the modules (Modulation, Delay, Boost, Pitch, Reverb, Compression and Drive) are assigned to individual footswitches. You also get Noise Gate and EQ modules plus volume, which can be controlled by an expression pedal. There are three possible routings for the effects – all can be connected serially if desired, but the two alternatives are to have the Reverb and Delay modules connected in parallel so no reverb is added to the delay

repeats or to have Modulation, Pitch, Delay and Reverb modules all in parallel so they don't affect each other.

You can assign a particular effect to each module. The Drive module, for instance, can either supply overdrive or distortion, while the Modulation module is host to chorus, flanger, vibrato, phaser, tremolo or panner – and there are many editable parameters. Once you've edited the system to get your preferred overall sound or set of sounds, your set-up can be saved to one of 60 user preset slots, alongside the 30 fixed factory presets.

The Nova System has two distinct operating modes, Pedal or Preset, but this is cleverly implemented so that elements of the other mode are still available in either.

Preset mode allows you to instantly call up stored presets using three footswitches – the Reverb, Comp and Drive switches (numbered 1, 2 and 3) access the three presets in every bank. To increment the bank up or down you need to press and hold the Mod and Pitch switches respectively. Normal short presses on these two will actually activate/deactivate the modulation and pitch effects in the preset, while delay and boost are also switchable. This mode will therefore enable you to dial in a particular sound for a song or part of a song, but still have individual control over all but the compression, reverb and drive. For more flexibility, a G-Switch added to the system will facilitate program changes so all of the effects bypass footswitches can be used.

In Pedal mode all of the footswitches turn their relevant modules on and off, just like a bunch of individual pedals – albeit with the settings that are stored within the active preset. However, pressing and holding the Reverb, Comp or Drive switches for about half a second enables you to select that active preset from a choice of three. This effectively provides you three different pedalboard set-ups onstage.

Sounds

The first thing you notice when playing through the Nova System is the excellent sound

The first thing you notice playing through the Nova System is the excellent sound quality. The digital effects are pristine



PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOBY SESSIONS

The Rivals

Nova System

Carl Martin's Quattro (£339) offers compression, overdrive, chorus and echo in a user-friendly floorboard with just switches and knobs rather than menus. **BOSS's GT-10** (£459) is its flagship multi-effects, with two separate effects paths featuring Roland's COSM amp modelling technology.

The Rivals

Nova Reverb

Electro-Harmonix's Holiest Grail (£174) offers plenty of parameters and comes with eight presets. **BOSS's RV-5** (£139) has six reverb sounds including a spring reverb emulation and gated reverb. **T-Rex's Room-Mate** is now joined by the less complex **ToneBug Reverb** (£135).

quality. The digital effects are pristine, with a great range of available variations. In the modulation section there's everything from vintage amp-style tremolo and vibrato to a slew of phasing, chorus and flanging effects, while the pitch effect offers subtle detuning and octave effects through to a full-on whammy effect if you connect an expression pedal. All manner of harmonies are also available via the intelligent pitch shifter, while the separate reverb and delay effects allow plenty of scope for setting up all shades of ambience. Whether you wish to emulate old-school tape echo and spring reverb or set up U2-style synchronised rhythmic repeats – it's here.

Now, while TC is renowned for its digital effects, it's aware that analogue is the way to go for the best in dirty sounds, so it has added analogue overdrive and distortion, but with digital control for accurate tweaking and storing of settings. Both sound really good, with the overdrive smoothly mimicking valve amp tone from clean through crunch to cranked, contrasting with the somewhat edgier distortion – suitable for fat chords and screaming leads. The independent Boost switch conveniently gives you extra welly when you need it.

With its solid build, high visibility and the way that it can be set up for effects switching and calling up patches, the Nova System is an ideal stage workhorse. And with its switchable speaker simulation for the outputs, it could also double as a practical direct recording tool.

Of course you may not be in the market for a multi-FX



pedal, but instead looking for one with some of the Nova System's sounds onboard. This brings us to the Nova Reverb and Nova Dynamics pedals that we also have for review.

Nova Reverb

The NR-1 Nova Reverb, although not the most compact pedal around, is still a nicely manageable size for most pedalboards and provides a comprehensive selection of five different reverb types, each with its own sub-types and loads of control over the sound. The pedal can be run in stereo and mono in/stereo out, as well as standard stompbox-style mono. It also has two footswitches for instant access to two different reverb sounds – one set by the position of the pedal's physical controls, the other a single preset sound saved to the memory.

Reverb type is selected by pressing one of five buttons that call up either the Room, Spring, Hall, Plate or Specials reverbs. Subsequent presses on the button scroll through the sub types – there are small, medium, large and tiled room reverbs for example. Five knobs tweak the sound setting. Decay, Predelay, Color (basically a tonal control) and Mix are standard fare, but the Dynamix knob sets up a 'ducking' reverb controlled by the level of the input signal. It can either attenuate the reverb while you're playing, allowing it

to come through stronger between phrases, or alternatively give you loads of reverb while you're playing and then less when you stop.

The reverb sounds here are all high quality and the tweakable parameters ensure that you can dial in just about any sound you want. The Dynamix effect in particular will

definitely appeal to those who don't want to muddy their sound up, but still want the reverb to bloom on decaying notes. Digital emulation of a spring reverb is less common than room, hall and plate reverbs, which can all be found in other pedals and processors. So the inclusion of it here, along with the fact that you always have two reverb sounds to call upon, is what will endear this box to many guitarists, as the three variations of it come pretty close to the flavour of the real thing.

Nova Dynamics

The NDY-1 Nova Dynamics pedal packs two effects engines into a single box so you can have two compressors, two noise gates, or a compressor and noise gate. You can use the pedal in

standard mono mode with the two engines used individually or together (one feeding the other), but the dual inputs and outputs also allow for different routings. For example, a mono input feeding two amps, each from a different engine; a single amp with alternate guitars, one plugged into each engine, so you can have different level calibration, say, for single-coils or humbuckers; one engine in line in front of your amp with the other one connected into the effects loop.

Each engine can be set up as a multi-band studio-style compressor, a typical stompbox compressor or as a noise-gate. The whole signal can be processed or you can introduce parallel compression via a 'Dry Blend' button that only compresses part of the signal – useful for keeping the attack of your note intact while adding body to the sound. Four knobs control the parameters of the processing for each engine.

Once set up, the noise gate does what it says on the tin and, especially with very high-gain signals, can help tame the amp hiss between played parts – it's very effective when placed in an amp's effect loop. Compression can be used subtly, keeping signal levels in check, or as an effect to be heard, adding pop and snap to notes or increasing sustain, and the Nova seems to cover all the

The NDY-1 Nova Dynamics packs two effects engines into a single box so you can have two compressors, two noise gates or a compressor and noise gate



The Rivals

Nova Dynamics

No single pedal does what the Nova Dynamics does, but **Barber's Tone Press** (£149) offers parallel compression while the **Analogman Bi-CompROSSor** (\$275) puts two respected vintage compressor sounds – the Ross compressor and the Dan Armstrong Orange Squeezer – into one box.



Each effect has a variety of easily selectable modes

options. The Studio compressor here is a little more refined than the Stomp setting, which has more of that classic squash you'd get from, for example, a vintage MXR Dynacomp. But with both engines running you can coax out all manner of compressed sounds.

Verdict

TC sees the Nova System as a viable compact alternative to carrying a massive pedalboard rig around, making much of the idea that you can slip it into a bag and carry it with you, even taking it onboard a plane. Certainly that's one advantage of this unit – if you're travelling light to gigs and relying on hired/borrowed amps then it's a marvellous 'front end' to ensure that you can consistently get the sounds you need, plus it has automatic power switching if you happen to be playing abroad. Regardless of that though, it sounds great, offers about as comprehensive a range of usable effects as you get in a multi-FX that's not equipped with its own pedal treadle – it's pretty damn bullet-proof too. Add your own wah and an expression pedal and there won't be many sounds that you can't conjure up.

As for the individual pedals, well not all guitarists would consider having a compressor in their signal chain but, for those that would, the Nova Dynamics is certainly versatile and would also be an extremely handy tool in the home studio. The Nova Reverb is probably the most comprehensive reverb stompbox around and provides all the reverb variations you're likely to need. Excellent.

The individual pedals' pricings are high compared to some of the competition, but they're a class act and quite specialist, so are worth the extra outlay if you want the quality. The Nova System, meanwhile seems like a steal: we like this a whole lot. **G**

The Bottom Line

TC Electronic Nova System

We like: Excellent sound; very practical footswitching; no wall wart

We dislike: Changing from Preset to Pedal mode is hidden in the depths of the utility menu

Guitarist says: A classy, versatile and bombproof multi-FX floor processor

TC Electronic NR-1 Nova Reverb

We like: Ease of use; wide range of reverb types; two reverb sounds permanently available; nice sounding spring emulation

We dislike: 12V power

Guitarist says: All the reverb you'll need in one box

TC Electronic NDY-1 Nova Dynamics

We like: Compact size; ease of use; comprehensive control of compression; two compressors in one box

We dislike: 12V power

Guitarist says: Signal housekeeping plus effects compression side by side in a versatile package



TC Electronic Nova System

PRICE: £477.25

ORIGIN: Thailand

TYPE: Guitar multi-FX system

FEATURES: Tuner, switchable speaker simulation, Tap Tempo switch, Boost switch

EFFECTS: Drive (overdrive, distortion), Comp (percussive, sustaining, advanced), EQ/Gate, Mod (chorus, flanger, vibrato, phaser, tremolo, panner), Pitch (shifter, octave, whammy, detune, intelligent pitch shift), Delay (clean, analog, tape, dynamic, dual, ping-pong), Reverb (spring, hall, room, plate)

PATCHES: 30 preset, 60 user

CONNECTIONS: 6.4mm jack guitar input, 6.4mm jack line input, 6.4mm jack outputs Left/Mono and Right, MIDI in, out, thru, S/PDIF in, S/PDIF out, pedal input

POWER: Mains IEC lead (100 to 240 VAC)

DIMENSIONS: 284 x 89 x 267mm

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 1.85/4.1

EXT CONTROL: Via Expression pedal, MIDI, TC G-Switch footswitch

OPTIONS: G-Switch (£49)

RANGE OPTIONS: TC's G-System (£1,391) is the daddy of its guitar effects processing line, with up to nine effects simultaneously and four switchable mono loops to add your own favourite pedals

TC Electronic

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Test results

Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



TC Electronic NR-1 Nova Reverb

PRICE: £241.50 (inc power adaptor)

ORIGIN: Thailand

TYPE: Programmable digital reverb pedal

FEATURES: Ducking reverb mode (Dynamix)

EFFECTS: 16 reverb types in five categories

PATCHES: One user-programmable preset

CONNECTIONS: Input L/Mono and R, Output L/Mono and R

POWER: Supplied mains power adaptor 12V DC

DIMENSIONS: 130 x 130 x 55mm

WEIGHT: 755g

OPTIONS: None

Test results

Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



TC Electronic NDY-1 Nova Dynamics

PRICE: £241.50 (inc power adaptor)

ORIGIN: Thailand

TYPE: Dual compressor/noise gate pedal

FEATURES: Parallel compression mode (dry blend)

EFFECTS: Studio and Stomp compression, noise gate

PATCHES: None

CONNECTIONS: Input A/Mono and B, Output A/Mono and B

POWER: Supplied mains power adaptor 12V DC

DIMENSIONS: 130 x 130 x 55mm

WEIGHT: 765g

OPTIONS: None

Test results

Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★