

Guitarist
CHOICE



Electro-Harmonix Memory Boy & Riddle: Q Balls £69 & £129

An old delay favourite shrunk in size and the funkiest of fellows to fettle your freak on... **by Mick Taylor**

Electro-Harmonix is seemingly relentless in its progress down the product development path of late. Whether it's pro audio tools or dear old stompboxes, the New York native's take on things is always slightly left of centre. Driven by the imagination and eccentricity of boss Mike Matthews, the results inspire countless players to make all kinds of fuzzy, squelchy and ethereal noises with their guitars and basses. Welcome then, two of the latest additions to the family...

Memory Boy

Continuing the lineage of the seminal Memory Man and Memory Man Deluxe delays, the brilliantly named Memory Boy comes in a much smaller, more robust, cast metal housing than its predecessors, with the added advantage of taking up less pedalboard real estate.

Pots are securely chassis-mounted and the switch is heavy duty – stomp heavily, but avoid those micro switches.

Devotees of the MM love its warm, analogue and modulated delay sounds that you can also manipulate with powerful feedback abilities for a bit of on-your-knees psyched-out weirdness. The Memory Boy picks up the mantle with all of the above, with the ability to effect the modulated repeats with either chorus or vibrato, and their respective waveforms to a triangle or square wave – that's to say smooth or stepped pitch changes.

Maximum delay time for a single repeat is around 550ms, which is pretty short by modern standards, but if you're buying this as a straight delay then, frankly, there are far better options available. No, the Memory Boy's raison d'être is its modulated delays. The first

mode, vibrato, is a fast pitch modulation of the delayed signal. The middle setting, pedal, is medium speed and the chorus setting is a slow speed pitch modulation. If you want to control the rate of the modulation yourself, you can use an optional expression pedal and select 'pedal' on the switch. However you do it, the depth pot varies the intensity of the modulation: how far the pitch goes up and down. If you want simple warm delay with no modulation, turn the depth pot fully anti-clockwise. The remaining controls are blend – a useful wet/dry mixer – and

You can get some utterly bonkers oscillations going [via the Memory Boy] with frequencies that would never normally come out of a guitar: addictive, albeit atonal, noise

The rivals

Memory Boy

There's no shortage of delays with modulation out there, but none that go as far as E-HX. The **MXR Carbon Copy** (£219) is our fave new analogue delay, with a subtle modulation setting. Not analogue, but fully featured, is the **Line 6 Echo Park** (£136.85) based on the brilliant DL-4. Also check out Behringer's distinctly E-HX-alike **VM1 Vintage Time Machine** (£79). Cheeky!

Riddle: Q Balls

DigiTech's X-Series Synth Wah (£85) is a capable auto/envelope filter, adding some bowel-shaking synth nastiness to the pot. The **BOSS AW-3 Auto-Wah** (£119) puts that trusted brand at your feet and with a vocal sim to boot. The **MXR Auto-Q** (£219) has that Crybaby lineage and would be our quality choice.



feedback, which begins as a normal repeats control at lower settings, through to full feedback at the other extreme, where the repeats get re-delayed and filtered over and over again for some truly odd noises, especially when you manipulate the delay time control. If you want to do that remotely via an expression pedal, you need to set the switch to vibrato or chorus.

The pedal is also true bypass, a fact that we checked by switching it off with no power connected: your signal passes through unaltered.

Sounds

At its simplest, the Memory Boy will do a convincing rock 'n' roll-style slapback; no modulation, short delay time and a short repeat – it should be pointed out that it doesn't do pristine digital-style delay and nor is it supposed to. Increasing the delay time ups the overall spaciousness, as you'd expect. Adding some modulation – either fast, medium or slow – can go from a barely detectable warble right through to full-on gut-churning sea sickness in triangle wave mode – the modulations go up and down uniformly – while in square wave the notes step up and down. At maximum depth, and with the signal set to fully wet, it's seventies/eighties sci-fi soundtrack personified: Blake's 7-style aliens. You can get some utterly bonkers oscillations going with frequencies that would never normally come out of a guitar: addictive, albeit atonal, noise.

Riddle: Q Balls

The easiest way to view this one is like a wah-wah – with added sonic funkiness – that you control with your playing attack. Basically, the harder you play, the more it affects the filter, however you choose to set it. So, let's get started...

First up, the R:QB has three modes: low pass, band pass and high pass, each of which emphasise different frequency bands within any sweep, though they don't affect the frequencies at which sweeps start and stop. These are controlled by the start and stop pots, which set the extent and direction of the filter's sweep.

Attack controls the speed of the sweep, while decay controls how fast the filter resets itself to the beginning of the sweep cycle. The Q pot controls the resonance of the filter; you can set it high to work over a narrow band of frequencies for a pronounced effect, or low for a more full-frequency response. Now if all that sounds confusing, just think of it as all the things you'd like to be able to change in your wah-wah, but can't!

The final control is sensitivity, and that's basically the trigger: how hard/loud you need to play to set the whole thing working.

There's even an analogue distortion circuit built in and operated by a separate on/off switch. Its intensity is governed by the sensitivity control and you can adjust its overall volume – for a solo boost for example – via an internal trim pot. You can't use the distortion independently. Finally, in addition to the usual in and out jacks, you also get a direct, unaffected output and an expression pedal to enable you to sweep through manually from your stop to start positions, just like you would with a regular wah.

It's good to see that the R:QB shares the Memory Boy's construction standards, though it is bigger – allow space for approximately two standard BOSS compacts.

Sounds

Anyone remember the Grange Hill theme? It's like a wah-wah, but with added quirky quackiness: check. You can start with a pretty straight auto-wah set-up – very useful if you can't get to grips with a treadle pedal, or indeed if you want your filter open precisely with every note you play. Then by adjusting the mode and other controls, widen that sonic potential to cover some fairly staggering frequency ranges with varying degrees of the lo-fi squelchy weirdness we've come to expect from E-HX – Bootsy Collins stand up – and indeed there's a bass version in the Enigma: Q Balls. It's much more than simple wah though, because by varying the attack and decay controls you can also extract

some ethereal happenings over chords and arpeggios, say.

The distortion circuit is a classic, fairly squarish sounding clip that adds even more lo-fi appeal. Boosting it to the max does offer a decent level lift, so you could go to the big wah solo, should you so desire, or simply add a fuzzy edge to your Q Balling. Check this month's Guitarist CD for examples.

Verdict

Getting lost in the Memory Boy simply requires a fairly loud amp and five minutes of your time. It spans nice slapback delay to schizophrenic sonic silliness that experimentalists

will adore. The compact housing, nine-volt centre-negative power supply and solid build make it a far more compelling pedalboard contender than its forebears. At this price, it's a winner.

The Riddle: Q Balls is a more niche offering; one for anyone who likes what a wah-wah does, but would like to manipulate its range and response to the nth degree. Highly interactive, you'll certainly need to be au fait with endless knob twiddling to get the most from this one – stomp and go it isn't. A great auto filter for guitarists, however, it most definitely is. **G**

The bottom line

Memory Boy

We like: Build; good basic delay sounds; analogue tone; bonkers psyched-out sounds
We dislike: 550ms may not be enough delay for some
Guitarist says: The delay for the alt-rock generation – a brilliant and practical update on a temperamental classic

Riddle: Q Balls

We like: Powerful control of filter; distortion circuit; loads of wacka-wacka...
We dislike: Could be very easily overused
Guitarist says: If you're serious about an auto wah/filter, this is a strong contender with a great deal of flexibility

Electro-Harmonix Memory Boy

PRICE: £69
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Analogue delay with modulation
CONTROLS: Delay time, depth, blend, feedback, triangle/square wave switch, vibrato/chorus/expression pedal switch
CONNECTIONS: All 6.4mm jacks: input, output, expression pedal out
MIDI: No
POWER: E-HX US96DC-200BI nine-volt centre-negative BOSS-style DC adaptor (supplied) or alkaline nine-volt battery
OPTIONS: Expression pedal for delay time or modulation rate. Requires TRS jack connector, compatibles include M-Audio EX-P, Roland EV-5
Electro-Harmonix
www.ehx.com

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Electro-Harmonix Riddle: Q Balls

PRICE: £129
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Envelope controlled filter
CONTROLS: Blend, mode, attack, decay, start, stop, Q, sensitivity, distortion switch
CONNECTIONS: All 6.4mm jacks: input, output, effect output, expression pedal out
MIDI: No
POWER: E-HX US96DC-200BI nine-volt centre-negative BOSS-style DC adaptor (supplied). No battery option
OPTIONS: Expression pedal for filter control (like a wah!) Enigma: Q Balls for bass

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★