

**BOSS PS-6 HARMONIST & ST-2 POWER STACK** £149 & £99  
EFFECTS



PHOTOGRAPHY BY JESSE WILD

# BOSS PS-6 Harmonist & ST-2 Power Stack £149 & £99

Two new stompboxes from opposite ends of the BOSS canon. A versatile harmoniser and pedal that aims to offer a stack in a box *by Simon Bradley*

As much as we love the Twin Pedals series and the new incarnations of the Cube amp, it's somewhat refreshing to be able to address a pair of new BOSS compact effects. One emulates the feel and response of a valve amp stack, the other does pitch shifting and three-voice harmony. Are we ready?

## PS-6 Harmonist

The main difference between a pitch-shifter and a harmoniser is that the latter adds intervals

from an existing note, while the former alters the pitch of the note you play and, among other things, the PS-6 provides both. In order to fit the Compact format, the PS-6's four-knob front panel can be rather confusing, simply due to the sheer amount of stuff that's crammed in – it takes various control combinations to access all the features.

The heart of it is the mode control, which selects the five basic modes; major or minor harmony, pitchshifting, detune

and S-Bend. For harmonising you first need to set the key you're playing in via the 12-way notched key pot and either the major or minor mode.

From there, the harmony pot provides 11 pitch and interval options, such as third above, fifth below, octave above and so on. It also gives a choice of four distinct three-part harmony intervals, such as third above with fourth below.

S-Bend is a new feature and is, in effect, a rudimentary Whammy. In that mode the footswitch allows you to apply the effect for as long as you have the pedal depressed. The balance and key controls alter their operation to rise time and fall time respectively, and you

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## The Rivals

### PS-6 Harmonist

The **DigiTech Whammy** (£195) remains the go-to pedal for real-time pitch shifting, while the **Micro POG** (£125) from **Electro-Harmonix** provides some genuinely spine-tingling effects. For studio-quality sounds and versatility, try the **Eventide PitchFactor** (£399).

### ST-2 Power Stack

The **MXR DD11 Dime Distortion** (£169) is among the filthiest pedals out there, while the morph pot of the **DigiTech Metal Master** (£80) provides a smooth gain curve. The **Danelectro Cool Cat Metal II** (£44.99) adds dirt to an already hot tone.

can to set it to give a pretty convincing dive-bomb effect.

Detune gives a subtle chorus effect, and 'pitch shifter' alters the note or chord to the amount set by the harmony pot with options including two octaves above or below, a seventh below and a fifth above. The dry signal stays audible and unaffected.

The versatility of the PS-6 can be significantly increased by using both outputs, as they produce different parts of the signal when used together. You can also operate the S-Bend functions by connecting any of the optional expression pedals BOSS produces.

## Sounds

Nearly all digital pitchshifters and harmonisers can have a tendency to sound like a fist-fight in Munchkin Land and our advice would be to use such effects sparingly. Here the harmony mode isn't intended for anything other than single notes and, once you've set the right key, the intervals are sufficiently accurate. Of course, sending the effected signal to a second amp can help with the EQ of the wet tones as we can see that there'd be little chance of shoehorning an additional EQ pot onto the front panel.

If you're sausage-fingered, it can be fiddly to set the exact key as the increments of the key





There are lots of features packed in to just four controls

## The quality of drive tones on offer in the Power Stack is above question

control are quite small – doing this on-the-fly at a gig is a challenge without picking the pedal up and squinting.

Sometimes the pedal produces steps rather than a smooth glissando when bending over a full tone and we can't stress enough that you need to be perfectly in tune in the first place.

S-Bend is arguably the most interesting of all modes and setting rise time to seven or so and fall time to around five with the interval to -10 cent gives the credible dive bomb effect, and one that actually works. The alien flutter option is pretty cool, especially with higher gains, and the detune mode adds sparkle to any tone. In addition, the bonus of polyphonic pitch shifting – use it on chords – is a lot of fun.

However, the performance of the harmony and pitch shift are tonally and operationally compromised compared with Eventide's PitchFactor, for example, though that unit is considerably more expensive.

### ST-2 Power Stack

BOSS produces more than its fair share of metal-style distortion pedals, but the ST-2 has just one thing on its mind: to recreate the crushing power of all-valve amp stacks. In real terms this doesn't relate so much to the ferocity of the drive but rather the depth and percussive nature of a sound produced by two 4 x 12 cabinets

thanks to their cubic volume.

It has three basic tones or gain settings – crunch, drive and ultra – accessed by the sound control, and you can also utilise increments between each should you desire. There's also a level pot plus distinct bass and treble controls, which help a great deal in tailoring the tone to your own desire: that's about as complicated as the ST-2 gets.

### Sounds

Playing through a double Marshall stack at proper levels can be a daunting experience, and even though the pedal's crunch option is pure classic rock, you do have to willingly suspend your disbelief when playing the ST-2, especially via headphones. Our Marshall JCM900 and 4 x 12 cab doesn't need any additional oomph, while either headphones or a combo loaded with a single 12-incher will never be able to compete with a full stack in percussive terms, irrespective of the pedal's tonal heat.

The quality of the drive tones on offer is above question, though, and setting the pot just past the drive point gives an extremely satisfying hard rock tone, especially when using a bridge humbucker. Moving the pot not only adds or reduces gain but alters the tone's character, and turning it back to ultra simulates cascading drive and also gives a more scooped tone for those metal moments. The pedal's EQ is perfectly

efficient and overall the unit is one of the more versatile overdrive/distortion pedals available today. However, where you'd use the ST-2 is another question, as we found its punch was wholly dependant on what amp rig we used. It's a cool unit, but be careful with your expectations – despite the name, you're asking for a miracle if you want it to transform your 1 x 8 practice combo into a full Mesa or Marshall stack.

### Verdict

These two pedals offer an impressive selection of options for a quick and relatively cost-effective route to some usable sounds for both practise and performance.

The PS-6 opens the world of harmony and pitch shifting to beginners. The S-Bend mode is a fun variation on the DigiTech Whammy theme with more than enough potential to excite, but while the other features are certainly usable, serious-minded shifters will want more refinement.

As long as you don't assume that the ST-2 can turn your solid-state practice combo into an all-valve amp stack – check out this issue's CD for a video demo of its capabilities – it offers a degree of amp-like feel and clout, with huge levels of gain on tap and a nicely squashed pick attack. **B**

## The Bottom Line

### PS-6 Harmonist

**We like:** S-Bend mode; wealth of features

**We dislike:** Cluttered front panel; flighty compared with the best; difficult to use under stage lighting

**Guitarist says:** An eye into the world of pitch shifting for enthusiasts rather than serious shifters

### ST-2 Power Stack

**We like:** Ease of use; tonally versatile; efficient EQ

**We dislike:** Nothing of note

**Guitarist says:** A wealth of drives from classic rock to metal, but don't expect stack-making miracles!



## BOSS PS-6 Harmonist

**PRICE:** £149

**ORIGIN:** Taiwan

**TYPE:** Harmony shifter pedal

**PROGRAMMABLE:** No

**CONTROLS:** Balance, harmony/shift, Key and mode pots

**CONNECTIONS:** Input, two outputs, expression pedal input, all 6.4mm jack

**POWER:** 9V battery or BOSS PSA

**OPTIONS:** EV-5 exp pedal (£69)

**RANGE OPTIONS:** OC-3 (£109)

**Roland UK**

**01792 702701**

**www.roland.co.uk**

## Test results

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

**GUITARIST RATING** ★★★★★



## BOSS ST-2 Power Stack

**PRICE:** £99

**ORIGIN:** Taiwan

**TYPE:** Distortion pedal

**PROGRAMMABLE:** No

**CONTROLS:** Level, bass, treble, sound

**CONNECTIONS:** 6.4mm jacks

**POWER:** 9V battery or BOSS PSA

**RANGE OPTIONS:** MD-2 (£85),

MT-2 (£99) or DS-1 (£45)

## Test results

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

**GUITARIST RATING** ★★★★★