

Quicktest



Roland Cube Street EX £459

Portable powerhouse with street smarts

CONTACT: Roland UK PHONE: 01792 702701 WEB: www.roland.co.uk

Fancy doing some busking? If so, you might just be interested in Roland's new Cube Street EX, an update on the previous Street model, that the company says offers a huge performance upgrade. What you get is a wedge-shaped battery- or mains-powered 50-watt stereo amp with four independent channels for connecting a variety of mics and instruments.

What's more, there is an array of familiar COSM amp models available and the ability to plug in your iPhone or iPad via an included four-pole cable to play backing music (there's a free Cube JAM app with phrase training facilities) or record your own performances.

In Use

The Cube Street EX's dual eight-inch woofers and two-inch tweeters can push out a powerfully loud sound on its 50-watt setting, and there are also 25-watt and 10-watt output power modes, which are more economical with battery power.

A flexible range of sounds include very usable Clean, Crunch and Lead options, as well as a functional acoustic simulator for electric guitar, while electro-acoustics get to use the amp's clear-sounding preamp. You also get an onboard tuner, three-band EQ, reverb and a choice of chorus or delay.

Verdict

Okay, £459 is a significant investment, but in return you get a product optimised for outdoor performance that's light, has a substantial carrying handle or optional water-resistant shoulder-strapped case and is packed with enough sounds and connectivity options to suit the needs of most street musicians. [TC]

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: *Practical and portable amplification for busking and 'let's do the show right here' performances*



Guitarist
CHOICE

NSF Controls Free-Way switch

approx £25

Not quite your normal three-way toggle switch

CONTACT: NSF Controls Ltd PHONE: N/A WEB: www.freewayswitch.com

Yes, it looks like a regular three-way toggle switch that you'd find on most double 'bucker guitars, but this is a toggle switch that works in two planes (each with three positions), creating a six-position switch. Designed primarily for twin-humbucker guitars with four-conductor wiring, it allows for various pickup coil configurations and huge versatility.

Guitar-maker Chris George explains: "I discovered the switch while building a triple single-coil guitar, but I wanted – apart from each pickup individually – all available twin-pickup combinations: bridge and middle, bridge and neck, and middle and neck."

Now that could all be done with a push/push or push/pull on the tone or volume control, or even a separate DPDT switch, but the Free-Way is

simpler and doesn't add extra switches to fight with on stage.

In Use

Once you get used to the dual plane of the switch, it works like a dream. All connections are 'make before break', so there are no clicking or popping noises as you change positions. "The only downside," mentions Chris, "is that it isn't quite as smooth as, say, a Switchcraft long-spring contact toggle switch."

Verdict

For expanded sounds, without altering your guitar's switches, try this. A great UK-designed/ manufactured product. [DB]

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: *Tricky switching be gone! If you need to expand your pickup switching options, this takes some beating*



Guitarist
CHOICE

Electro-Harmonix B9 Organ Machine & Deluxe Big Muff **£165 & £85**

Organise your guitar sound and never lose your Muff in a mix

CONTACT: Electro-Harmonix PHONE: N/A WEB: www.ehx.com

The ever-prolific Electro-Harmonix is constantly expanding its range. Here, we focus on two very different pedals: the B9, designed to make your guitar sound like an organ, and the Deluxe Big Muff Pi, which adds another layer of versatility to the iconic fuzzbox.

On the B9, two knobs set the level of dry and emulated organ sound at the main output, while the Dry output can deliver unprocessed signal to an additional amp. Nine presets are provided via a rotary switch, covering a range of classic organ sounds. Two knobs adjust parameters: for the presets that reproduce Hammond organ sounds, they add chorus (for rotary speaker simulation) and key click; and for the Vox Continental sound they control realistic vibrato. There's also tremolo for a cathedral organ and an electric piano/organ hybrid.

Most of EHX's Big Muff variations have stuck to the tried and tested three-knob configuration, with volume and sustain knobs complemented by a tone knob that spans a wide range. This new Deluxe version adds a noise gate, adjustable note attack, toggle-switched Bass Boost, and an extra footswitch that brings in midrange EQ adjustment to the unit to help it stand out in a mix.

Sounds

Although the B9's modulation effects work well, routing the sound through a dedicated rotary speaker simulator really opens things up. Tracking is fast enough for stage use; you get out what you play in, but with an organ sound. If you adapt your technique and think like an organist, it can sound eerily authentic, although not all organ techniques are possible, of course. The pedal has a

decent sustained note length, but it won't sustain forever like holding down a key, and shifting between chords isn't as smooth. There is a whole new sonic area to explore, though, through mixing dry guitar and organ.

If you don't engage the extra features, the Deluxe Big Muff is a classic Muff through and through, with predictable operation and tone. The Bass Boost adds some welcome low-end heft if you wish to bolster the sound when the Tone knob is rolled up. The noise gate works well rolled back just far enough to kill any hiss when you're not playing, but you can also use it for an obvious gated fuzz effect, and the Attack knob can add some useful gritty pick definition. The new parametric Mid EQ facility offers cut or boost at the midrange frequency you select in either a broad or narrow bandwidth (Q), which means

that you can variously scoop the mids or dial in a sharper edge (quite extreme if you want it) to make your tone cut through in a band context. With the footswitch allowing it to be brought in at any time, you can have instant access to two disparate or complementary sounds. The frequency can also be controlled via an expression pedal that you can exploit for some cool wah-style effects.

Verdict

With its carefully considered new features, the Deluxe Big Muff is massively more potent while still retaining its essential character. And as for being able to play organ from a guitar, we are gobsmacked! **[TC]**

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: EHX's most versatile Big Muff ever, and now we can all play Green Onions

<http://bit.ly/guitarist387>

SiB! Mr Echo £199

The vintage-themed echo where self-oscillation rules

**Guitarist
CHOICE**

CONTACT: Zoom Distribution PHONE: 08432 080999 WEB: www.sibfx.com

The much-loved brand continues its re-emergence, fuelled by its former glories. The original blue Echodrive unit delivered 600ms of analogue delay with the character of tape, while the red one used a digital chip for around double the delay time; both had valve preamps and are much sought-after.

Mr Echo is a more modern affair, smaller, battery-powered, and with no valves. It delivers 550ms from a circuit based around the PT2399 IC, a digital chip, renowned for its ability to mimic analogue delay.

Sounds

The core sound is warm, fat and with nostalgia-inducing high-

end roll-off to the repeats as they decay. 550ms isn't enough for huge soundscapes, but it is for anything from rock 'n' roll slapback to the kind of 300ms-ish delays that name players from David Gilmour to Eric Johnson to David Grissom like so much. It's easy to push into tripped-out self-oscillation with the repeats, which you can then manipulate using the delay time knob for experimental overload. The slam button is brilliant: the non-latching switch drops the delay time to 30ms and – depending where the repeat control is set – immediately starts to self-oscillate. A 'Plus' version of the pedal (£219) has a separate repeats control for the slam function only.



Verdict

Seeing the SiB! name revitalised is a treat for effects enthusiasts. While this stompbox is some way short of the blue Echodrive's tonal magic, it's nevertheless a unique delay that does a great job of simulating single-head tape-echo sounds. The addictive slam control is

simply inspired. Give it a go: perhaps it will inspire you and your playing, too. [MT]

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: Unique analogue-sounding delay with volume boost and momentary self-oscillation: trippy!

Zoom H5 Handy Recorder £249

Portable recording with a range of options

CONTACT: Zoom UK PHONE: 01462 791100 WEB: www.zoomcorp.co.uk

The latest in Zoom's long line of portable stereo digital recorders, the H5 can be used with the full range of Zoom's interchangeable input capsules – like the flagship H6 – allowing you to choose the ideal setup for a variety of recording situations. It comes with an X/Y stereo capsule that has the ability to handle sound pressure levels to 140dB, making it suited to capturing gigs as well as everyday recording functions.

In Use

Besides the stereo capsule, there are also two mic/line inputs, allowing the H5 to handle four tracks of simultaneous recording that can be configured in several

ways. You can record two stereo tracks, perhaps a gig, with the mics while also recording an output from the FOH desk. Alternatively, you can record a stereo track and two mono tracks or, if you add the EXH-6 combo capsule, four mono tracks. As the H5 supports overdubbing, it can be used as a multi-tracker to build songs track-by-track.

Other functions are use as a 4-in/2-out or 2-in/2-out USB audio interface with a computer-based DAW or an iPad (stereo recording only) and phrase training with the onboard looping and pitch/speed adjustment. There are no complaints about audio quality, either: it's superb.

Verdict

In terms of portability, the H5 unit is a bit larger than some of the other pocket-sized stereo recorders available out there, but it's still very portable. It sounds great and boasts a versatile and professional feature set, which means it's not only able to make high-quality recordings of your gigs, but it can also take care of a host of other tasks as well. [TC]

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: Quality, hugely versatile recording wherever you may roam

**Guitarist
CHOICE**



Vox AC4C1-12 combo £319

Long-player - Vox adds a 12-inch version of its popular small amp

CONTACT: Vox **PHONE:** 01908 304600 **WEB:** www.voxamps.com

Introduced with the AC15 back in 1958, Vox's AC4 is one of the original British guitar amplifiers – in fact, the AC part of the name refers to Alternating Current mains power, which not all areas of the UK had back then. Originally called the AC2, Vox renamed it the AC6 and then the AC4 in around 1962, with no significant changes to the circuit, which featured a built-in tremolo and three controls for volume, tone and speed. The modern version has a completely new circuit, and Vox also upgraded the driver to a proper 10-inch Celestion loudspeaker. Now, it's gone a step further by releasing a 12-inch version, appropriately called the AC4C1-12.

While the AC4 looks similar to a mid-1960s product, the internals are significantly different from the originals, which used an EF86 preamplifier and an EZ80

rectifier alongside a single EL84 power valve. The EL84 remains and is now powered by a silicon rectifier and driven with the more common but less troublesome 12AX7/ECC83 in the preamp. The circuitry is printed-circuit based, using a non-plated board in a simple L-shaped steel chassis. Alongside the single-input jack socket, there are chicken head knobs for preamp gain, bass, treble, and a master volume. Because the AC4 is a pure single-ended Class A design, the EL84 runs hot – very hot in fact – with a lot of heat conducted to the control panel. There's ventilation, but it's not very effective. This apart, the AC4 is a good-looking and generally well-made little amp.

Sounds

Sonically, the AC4 is well behaved, with just a faint background hum – something

common to many single-ended designs. We tried it with a Strat fitted with regular-output Duncan Alnico Pro II pickups (Hank-approved clarity for vintage Shadows stuff) and a PAF-loaded Les Paul Standard. Used at lower gain levels, the AC4's clean sounds are typical of what you might expect to hear from an early Vox: a boxy midrange and restrained bass coupled with a zingy treble that needs to be carefully tamed.

Set that treble knob right, though, and you get the chiming chord effect that makes the AC4's bigger brother one of the great rhythm guitar amps. Turn up the gain some more, and the AC4's blues/rock alter ego appears, with a sweet singing sustain that's great for invoking the original British Invasion vibe. Ideally, you need a decent humbucker for this, and the AC4 sounded great with our Les Paul, although vintage PAF

users should note the increased gain makes unpotted pickups much more likely to squeal.

Verdict

There are lots of small single-ended amps clamouring for your cash, but only a few of them have one of the most famous badges in guitarland. Ideal for home users, and great for lower-volume environments, the AC4C1-12's bigger speaker lends more authority and punch for live use. However, for recording, we would still favour the slightly more compressed frequency response of the 10-inch version, because it's quicker and easier to dial in. Check it out soon and see if you agree. **[NG]**

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: Classic Vox clean and overdrive sounds in a very portable package



Tech21 Fly Rig5 £299

A pedalboard that will travel anywhere

CONTACT: Rocky Road Distribution **PHONE:** 01494 535333 **WEB:** www.tech21nyc.com

There's plenty to be said for travelling light, but sometimes it's a necessity – transportation and travel constraints, or restrictions at a particular venue could possibly see you getting to a gig without your usual backline or pedalboard and being faced with unfamiliar, borrowed and possibly substandard equipment. So, how do you get your sound?

New York City's Tech21 has the answer in the form of the Fly Rig5: a small but perfectly functional pedalboard weighing just over 18oz (510 grams), measuring less than a foot long (300x70mm). It's powered by a slim single 12-volt DC adaptor that is auto-switching, so it can be used anywhere in the world, with voltages from 100 volts to 240 volts, adding to its portability appeal. What you get is the equivalent of five

stompboxes, or four effects and an amp simulator, depending on how you view the SansAmp.

The SansAmp is, in fact, at the heart of the Fly Rig, taking up the centre section of the unit. Stomp on its footswitch and its six mini control knobs light up blue. You get level and drive knobs, three-band EQ and a spring reverb emulation based on the Boost RVB pedal. In front of the SansAmp, you get the Plexi section, based on Tech21's Hot-Rod Plexi pedal.

One footswitch emulates the natural overdrive and distortion of a late-60s Marshall, with sound dialled in with level, tone and drive controls. A second 'Hot' footswitch brings in up to 21dB of boost and can be used independently of the Plexi distortion. Last in the signal chain is the DLA, a delay with tap tempo.

Sounds

Of distinctly robust metal construction, the Fly Rig has high-quality footswitches that are far enough apart to keep the whole thing uncluttered and easy to operate. You can plug it into a guitar amp or straight into a PA or mixing desk.

With the latter, the amp and speaker simulation from the SansAmp section ensure that you are getting the right sort of mic'd amp sound, but the SansAmp still has its use with your own (or someone else's) amp, where it can easily fulfil the function of an overdrive pedal. It's voiced to have a Fender-ish chiming clean tone with the drive knob down, but higher settings of drive dirty things up nicely. Even if you choose not to use this section, you've still got boost, distortion and delay to play with. The

Plexi distortion offers the flavour of a Marshall cruising on hot valves, and the delay sounds really good – it's voiced to sound like vintage tape delay, and besides the standard controls for level, repeats and delay time, there's a drift knob for a touch of wow and flutter.

Verdict

The Fly Rig5 is an extremely functional unit that contains arguably the most essential effects. It's also a life-saver should your equipment go down at the last minute, as well as being the answer to the prayers of guitarists who need to travel light. **[TC]**

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: Slip one into your guitar case and you'll always be covered for sound



Rode NT-USB £129

Plug-in-and-play desktop condenser mic

CONTACT: Source Distribution **PHONE:** 020 8962 5080 **WEB:** www.rodemic.com

A microphone with built-in USB interface to sit next to your computer is a no-brainer if you want to capture and collate musical ideas on the fly. Still, sometimes that's as far as this type of mic will go: some of the desktop 'podcasting' type of mics don't really cut it when it comes to recording classically-sounding vocals, acoustic guitar and more. Rode hopes to change that with its new NT-USB, which offers a condenser mic, closer to the size of those found in studios, with USB connection and coming with a pop-shield plus a tripod mount, as well as normal mic stand connectivity.

In Use

The mic plugs straight into Windows and Mac OS-based computers and can connect to an iPad using an Apple Camera Connection Kit. Two knobs set the level from its headphone

output and the balance between the source sound and that coming back from your computer. The pop-shield attaches to the mic at an ideal distance, letting you record vocals with no unwanted pops or other artifacts. The mic also does a fine job recording acoustic guitar, and offers a clarity and sound across the frequency range. The amount of bottom-end depth and top-end sheen belies its price, considering it includes a preamp/headphone amp and digital conversion.

Verdict

Quality sounds with ease of use at a bargain price. **[TC]**

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: An ideal package for acoustic recordings on computer or iPad



Fender Rumble 200 Bass Combo £490

Light and portable but still ready to rumble

CONTACT: Fender GBI **PHONE:** 01342 331700 **WEB:** www.fender.com

Nicely presented with black livery, silver grille cloth and neat metal corners, the Rumble 200 weighs so little that it's hard to believe it's actually a bass amp! Even more surprising is just how forceful a sound it produces. The control panel features both input and master volumes, three preset tone buttons, an overdrive section and a four-band EQ that includes a semi-parametric mid section. Loaded with a robust 15-inch Eminence speaker and a switchable horn, this compact unit also features front porting so all of the sound is projected forwards. Rear sockets include auxiliary input, headphones, DI connection and effects send and return: this solid-state combo looks equipped for all your practice and standalone small gig needs.

Sounds

Set the tone controls flat to experience the three tonal presets for a good indication of what can be achieved here.

Bright adds some extra bite and growl; Contour, some bass boost; and Vintage takes us back to those classic Fender bass amp sounds of the 60s.

After shaping your sound, you can use the main tone controls to enhance further, or create your own sound from scratch. For some added colour, try the overdrive section with drive and level controls that allow you to create your perfect blend between distorted and clean. From subtle to downright nasty, this can deliver them all.

Verdict

The quality and sound projection from something this easy to transport is what makes this combo so impressive. If you crave portability, yet still want lush and distinctive tones, this will do the job really well. **[RN]**

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: A serious contender when the ratio between weight/delivery is key