



JIM DUNLOP ECHOPLEX EP103 DELAY £189

The name remains the same, but the Echoplex evolves – find out how Dunlop has reimagined classic tape echo as a compact pedal...

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Adam Gasson

The original Echoplex tape echo contributed to many classic music performances. Jimmy Page used one live with Led Zeppelin – it was especially prominent in the violin bow section in *Dazed And Confused*. Then there's John Martyn's Echoplex-driven performances on the BBC's *The Old Grey Whistle Test*, Andy Summers' use of one with The Police, and Brian May using two units live for the stacked guitar harmonies on *Brighton Rock*. There are plenty more...

Featuring a certain simplicity of operation when compared with multi-head echoes, the Echoplex had just one fixed playback head and a sliding record/erase head, the delay time being set by the distance between the two. It was launched in 1961 and was originally valve-based, until settling on the solid-state EP-3 model, produced from 1970 to 1991, featuring an FET preamp that many guitarists used (with or without delay) to colour and drive their amps.

Jim Dunlop acquired the Echoplex name some years ago and recently introduced the Echoplex EP101 booster and tone-conditioning pedal, designed to emulate an EP-3's preamp. Now, with the release of the EP103, it's the turn of the actual tape echo.

Sounds

In a solidly built enclosure the same size as MXR's Phase 90, the EP103 looks smart with cool chickenhead knobs above the silver logo. The EP103 is set up by default for standard pedalboard mono use and can support stereo operation by using TRS splitter cables and setting an internal switch. There are also options available for a Wet mode, where only the wet signal is outputted, and to change the bypass mode – Normal operation via a true bypass relay can be changed to a buffered Trails option that allows the repeats to ring out and die naturally after you hit the bypass switch.

ABOVE Press and hold the Volume knob to simulate "the sonic qualities of an ageing EP-3", says Dunlop

RIGHT The EP103 comes in at the same size as MXR's Phase 90



The three knobs offer standard delay pedal functions: Delay sets the delay time, Sustain sets the number of repeats, and Volume sets the level of the delay against the dry signal, with the two at parity at about 12 o'clock, so you can take things further for repeats louder than the original. The Volume knob has a dual function: press-and-hold and this knob acts as an Age control to simulate, says Dunlop, “the sonic qualities of an ageing EP-3”. So, basically you can take it from pristine to knackered in the sweep of the knob – and once you’ve decided on a sound you like, you can press the knob once again to store it. Consequent presses of the Volume knob (something you could do with your foot while you’re playing) will then instantly toggle between the default sound and the ‘aged’ sound, which is indicated by a red LED.

Without Age engaged, the repeats have a great sound to them anyway, relatively clean but with a subtle degeneration that makes each subsequent repeat more blurry as it melts into the background. The Sustain knob is thoughtfully graduated, running from a single slap-back and initially adding in extra repeats very gradually. It’s only in a very small arc of travel, near fully clockwise, that you get into self-oscillation, so that’s all easily controllable and means the rest of the travel offers subtle variations on how you hear repeats beyond the initial one.

The Age function changes a combination of the parameters, all pertinent to how tape delays function – notably, that tape degenerates over time and that idiosyncrasies in the electro-mechanical realm, such as worn pinch rollers, can cause ‘wow and flutter’-style

modulation. Turning it up brings in some modulation that starts like mild chorus and adds a percussive edge to the repeats. As you advance it, the sound gets grittier until the repeats get fatter and extremely woolly (as you’d get if you really saturated the tape), while the pitch variation intensifies.

The delay time range runs from a doubling effect through slapback to about 750ms, so there’s plenty there to cover all the common eventualities including the rhythmic stuff, May-style harmonising and floaty ambience... and if you add MXR’s M199 Tap Tempo footswitch (£39 and reviewed in the Audition section of this issue on p128), you can up the game with a maximum four seconds of delay time.

Overall, you get a practical range of easily dialled-in delays alongside plenty of tape echo-style colour that you can exploit. Careful juxtaposition of all the knobs will yield a myriad of sweet spots to complement whatever you’re doing on guitar.

Verdict

If you want a real tape-based Echoplex, you’ll have to go vintage or try Fulltone’s modern reproduction, but the EP103 provides a decent, non-troublesome recreation of *that* sound in a convenient package. **G**

PROS Nice tape echo flavour in a compact pedal; optional bypass; adjustable tape-ageing parameter; tap tempo possibility

CONS You’d have to pair it with an EP101 for the fullest recreation of the vintage EP-3 sound

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Delay pedal

FEATURES: True relay or trails bypass, 65 to 750ms delay time (4s via tap tempo)

CONTROLS: Sustain, Volume, Delay, Age, internal mono/stereo switch, bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output, Tap Tempo pedal input

POWER: 9V DC adaptor (supplied), 240mA

DIMENSIONS: 64 (w) x 110 (d) x 50mm (h)

Westside Distribution
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