



MESA ENGINEERING SIGNAL MANAGEMENT SOLUTIONS

£95 to £259

Whatever the size of your pedalboard, Mesa's four-strong new range of tools aims to "reclaim your tone" and cure your rig of potential sonic doom

Words Nick Guppy Photography Neil Godwin

The popularity of stompboxes and pedalboards has never been higher than it is today, with players at all levels rediscovering the fun of 'roll your own' sound creation. However, that's not to say pedalboards are plain sailing; most players already know their pedals react differently and sometimes add more noise if they're connected in a particular order. Poor signal fidelity is something most pedal users get by with, but in the more demanding professional environment, where pedalboards might have 20 or more effects and cable runs are often measured in tens of metres, signal management becomes more important. Now, there's a solution for players at all levels, with an accessible range of tools courtesy of the masters of high-gain tone at Mesa Engineering.

Mesa's Signal Management Solutions range consists of a quartet of products to help improve the sound and consistency of just about any size of pedalboard, with no need for a degree in sound engineering. The new range includes the Stowaway buffer, the High-Wire dual buffer, and the Clearlink line driver Send and Receive boxes.

As you'd expect from Mesa, all four products are beautifully designed and engineered. The Stowaway is a small Class A buffer box that will fit unobtrusively on any pedalboard. It's intended to sit between your guitar and the first effect, effectively isolating the guitar from downstream interactions and producing a low impedance output signal that can drive practically any effect and prevent it loading down or interfering with

ABOVE All four of Mesa's new tools are beautifully engineered and are designed to improve the consistency and versatility of your rig

the guitar pickups. There are no controls, just a pair of input and output jacks, together with a power socket and an activity LED, so the Stowaway is essentially a 'fit and forget' item.

The High-Wire is the next step up, with a buffered input and output for the guitar and amp, and a separate buffered effects loop send and return. There's also a tuner output, a preset 3dB boost on a small toggle switch and a variable boost that can be foot-switched – handy for solos when you might want to drive an amplifier that much harder. The High-Wire's footswitch can also be used to mute the signal, leaving the tuner output on for quiet tuning and guitar changes.

The two Clearlink pedals are intended to work as a pair. The Send line driver provides a low-impedance output that drives unbalanced or balanced cables for improved noise rejection, while the passive Clearlink Receive converter contains a high-quality audio matching transformer with switches to flip the signal phase and lift the ground, if needed. All three active products are powered from a nine-volt DC supply and take industry standard 2.1mm centre negative plugs.

Sounds

We tried out all four tools with a small pedalboard that included an old wah/fuzz pedal, a digital multi-effects, and a budget analogue chorus and delay pedal. It turned out that the Stowaway works best after the wah/fuzz, as this particular pedal needs to see a high-impedance input, something that Mesa points out in the manual. However, it does a good job of improving the pedal's

sonic fidelity by removing a significant chunk of noise coming from a light dimmer switch.

The High-Wire dual buffer is a good all-round solution, generally beefing up the sound, adding focus and letting us punch a little more into the amp for solos. The Clearlink duo aren't so easy to test; using a 20-metre microphone cable and simulating noise from a few different sources proves they're doing their job, but they're intended for really long runs – over 50 metres – to provide an audible improvement. All four tools are remarkably transparent.

Verdict

Mesa's Signal Management Solutions are aimed primarily at the pro end of the market. However, they're relatively affordable and everyone who uses a pedalboard should take a look. The Stowaway and High-Wire dual buffer are potentially the most useful for pub and club players, while the Clearlink pair are best at handling arenas, outdoor festivals and big stages with much longer cable runs – up to 100 metres, if needed – or the more demanding environment of the pro recording studio. If you use pedals, there's a good chance one of these will make your rig sound better. **G**

PROS Four handy tools that deliver on their promise to revitalise your rig

CONS They lean towards the expensive, but as with all Mesa products you get what you pay for



MESA STOWAWAY INPUT BUFFER

PRICE: £95
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Discrete class A solid-state buffer with low impedance output
POWER: 9-12VDC, external source only
DIMENSIONS: 36 (w) x 98 (d) x 30mm (h)
CONTROLS: None

Westside Distribution
 0844 326 2000
 www.mesaboogie.com

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MESA HIGH-WIRE DUAL BUFFER & OUTPUT BOOST

PRICE: £185
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Discrete class A solid-state line driver with dual buffered inputs and outputs
POWER: 9-12VDC, external source only
DIMENSIONS: 62 (w) x 114 (d) x 52mm (h)
CONTROLS: Boost variable level and +3dB boost toggle

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MESA CLEARLINK SEND LINE DRIVER

PRICE: £125
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Discrete class A balanced/unbalanced line driver with low impedance outputs
POWER: 9-12VDC, external source only
DIMENSIONS: 62 (w) x 98 (d) x 43mm (h)
CONTROLS: +12dB level trim pot

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MESA CLEARLINK RECEIVE ISO/CONVERTER

PRICE: £259
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Balanced/unbalanced audio line receiver/converter with Jensen isolation transformer
POWER: Not required
DIMENSIONS: 62 (w) x 98 (d) x 43mm (h)
CONTROLS: Phase flip, ground lift

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