MANUFACTURER	PRICE
ROLAND UK	£439
MODEL	**01792 702701**
MS-3	**WWW.ROLAND.CO.UK**

BOSS

MS-3

What do get when you cross a pedal switcher with a multi-FX unit?
This Boss MS-3 – a versatile and brilliant pedalboard workhorse

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Occasionally a product comes along that is a real 'no brainer' pairing of two useful tools in one box – the new Boss MS-3 is one such item.

An ingenious hybrid melding two related-but-quite-different things, this is a pedal switcher for connecting your own pedals, but it is also a multi-FX unit with its own set of 112 effects, taking advantage of the COSM digital modelling in Boss's dedicated FX processors. There are three effect loops for connecting your own pedals that can be combined with the onboard effects – many different set-ups being possible via 200 onboard patches.

Besides the effects, the MS-3 can control external devices through a CTL Out jack for amp channel switching, plus it can send MIDI for clock out, program change and control change messages. Expression pedals and/or footswitches can be plugged in to control functions. You also get a tuner, noise suppressor and global EQ onboard.

A single patch in the MS-3 incorporates six internal effects blocks – FX1, FX2, Mod1, Mod2, Delay, and Reverb – plus the three loop effects (L1, L2 and L3). Although individually switchable, L1, L2 and L3 are in a defined order as a single block in the signal chain, so you can't put any internal effects between them, but you can place them before or after. With nine effects in the chain and four footswitches, it's obvious you can't have instant on/off switching for each effect. But for each patch you can choose effects to assign to the footswitches and define whether the rest of the effects are active or bypassed.

IN USE

The MS-3 has two modes of operation, Memory and Manual, which can be swiftly switched between with the single footswitch on its upper (flat) surface. This determines what the four footswitches on the angled surface do. In Memory mode they call up the four patches that reside in each of the 50 banks – scrolling through the banks is achieved by simultaneously pressing a pair of footswitches. In Manual mode the four footswitches operate whatever effect (internal or loop) is assigned to them. Those, however, are the most basic assignments of the footswitches – you can delve deep into the editing and set them to control multiple parameters, doing things like switching two effects at once

01 DISPLAY

Shows patch information in Memory mode and a visual representation of the footswitches in Manual mode

02 LOOPS LEDS

These small red LEDs show you which of the nine effects (six internal, three loops) are active in a patch

03 MEMORY/ MANUAL

Press this to change modes – the LED colours change accordingly – Memory: blue, Manual: red

CTL IN/OUT

You can control external gear from the MS-3, and plug in expression pedals and footswitches to control specific parameters

or toggling between parameter values. Momentary operation is also assignable.

Not exactly a plug-in-and-play unit then. The key to getting the MS-3 to work for you is in the preparation and setting up of the the patches – you will be amply rewarded with seamless onstage operation. Setting up includes choosing which onboard effects and physical pedals are active in the patch, what order they are in and which of them is assigned to which footswitch. It's not difficult to set up from the front panel via its informative display and three 'soft' knobs, but it's easier if you connect the MS-3 up to a computer and use the free editing and librarian software. There are many ways to use the MS-3 but it's likely users will discover

their preferred method and stick to it. One logical way would be to set the same footswitch assignments for each patch, so you could have three of your own dirt pedals assigned to the first three footswitches, while the fourth is used for switching internal effects. Alternatively, using the unit purely as a standalone processor, you could have the footswitches assigned as a standard pedalboard rig to, say, overdrive/distortion, modulation, delay and reverb.

The MS-3 is pretty powerful as a standalone FX processor with a wide range of effects to cover many possibilities, the FX1 and 2 categories featuring compressors, distortions, pitch shifters and more, Mod 1 and 2 covering chorus, flanging, phasing, tremolo and others. As

such, it's a solid starting point for building a system to be expanded – your own analogue drive, distortion or fuzz pedals in tandem with the more esoteric Boss effects, modulations, delays and reverbs could be a winning combination.

VERDICT

The MS-3 is a brilliant concept that could form the basis of a compact yet extremely versatile pedalboard, or simply be used by itself if you require an extensive but easily portable effects rig. **G**

PROS Compact footprint, comprehensive range of onboard effects, seamless combining of internal and external effects, software editing

CONS Fixed loop order in the signal chain