



HAMSTEAD SOUNDWORKS

Zenith Amplitude Controller

A classy tone-conditioning workhorse from the Brit boutique amp maker

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Hamstead knows a thing or two about creating tone and its new pedal, the Zenith Amplitude Controller, is all about getting the best tone out of your own equipment by offering EQ, boost and compression in one place. The signal path is all analogue, but three selectable routing options and some clever digital switching technology give you plenty of options for using the EQ and compression separately or combined.

SOUNDS

The three EQ knobs each offer 15dB of cut or boost with some selectable options on how the Middle operates: you can have centre frequencies of 500Hz, 800Hz or 1.2 kHz, and wide, medium and narrow Q (bandwidth). This is quality musical tone-

tweaking, with the Bass knob rolling off unwanted weight or adding girth without sounding flabby, the Treble knob adjusting the natural airy top-end, and the Middle knob offering targeted tweaks such as a Tube Screamer-ish mid hump or a Fender black-panel-style mid scoop. The output Level knob can add up to 20dB of boost to solidly hit your amp's front-end.

Compression is controlled by a single knob and has a very fast attack and medium/long release. The very natural, smooth compression will even things out and add sustain with a pleasing note bloom at higher settings. While it can affect note attack (although not the more extreme envelope change at the start of a note like, say, a Dynacomp), you can put some of that back by rolling the Blend knob back

from 100 per cent wet and bringing in a proportion of your dry sound.

You can choose to set the serial order of EQ and compression or run them in parallel. If your guitar hits the compressor first it will react to the full frequency of your playing dynamics, but putting the EQ first lets the compressor react to the EQ'd sound. This gives you the opportunity to tailor its operation, so you can set it not to overreact to low-end frequencies, for example. In Parallel mode the signal is split, so both get it equally, giving you the chance to mix two different versions of your original tone – one compressed and one with a different EQ profile layered together to create a composite sound.

Hamstead has built what it calls 'secret switching' into the pedal. As standard,

01. FRONT-PANEL TOGGLE SWITCHES

These set up how the Middle tone control operates: one for Q, one for frequency

02. FOOTSWITCH

The GigRig OptoKick footswitch offers silent optical switching and is also used to scroll through the modes (indicated by the state of the LED)

03. BLEND KNOB

This mixes between totally dry sound and 100 per cent compressed sound

04. LEVEL KNOB

This sets the pedal's master output level and can supply up to 20dB of boost if required

05. BASS, MIDDLE & TREBLE KNOBS

These adjust the EQ – each has a notched centre detent position and offers 15dB of cut or boost

06. REAR-PANEL SWITCH

Choose whether compression or EQ comes first in the chain or run them in parallel



Tech Spec

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Boost, EQ and compressor pedal

FEATURES: Buffered bypass, OptoKick footswitch

CONTROLS: Comp, Blend, Level, Bass, Middle, Treble, Q switch, Frequency switch, Circuit Order switch, internal trim pot for Compressor Master Level, bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output, standard Control input

POWER: 9V-18V DC adaptor (not supplied) 280mA at 9V

DIMENSIONS: 70 (w) x 130 (d) x 65mm (h)

Guitarist CHOICE

9/10

the Zenith operates like any pedal with the footswitch bypassing the whole effects (EQ and comp). However, you can hold the footswitch down for a couple of seconds and then use it to scroll through all the modes. Flip/Flop mode uses the footswitch to alternate between EQ and comp, which is useful if you're using the pedal with a separate switcher for bypass – the pedal's footswitch then becomes the effect selector. There's EQ Always On and the previously mentioned Comp Always On modes, with the footswitch bringing in the other effect. This is great if you want one of the effects as an always-on tonal component and then to bring the other in when needed. We liked this when running the effects in parallel, keeping a touch of compression permanently on

and switching an EQ-enhanced boost in when needed. In Comp Always On mode the Level knob is inactive until the EQ is switched in, so you can set it where you want for the amount of extra kick needed. Finally, there's Cycle where subsequent presses go from bypass to comp on to EQ on to both on. Independent switching of the EQ and comp circuits is also possible via external footswitch.

It's one of those pedals that just gives you more: playing through it with some mild compression, a little treble lift and a few decibels of boost delivers a real enhanced quality that is immediately missed when bypassed. But that's just one of a range of practical functions it is capable of in front of a decent amp. It can also be put to use in an amp's effects loop where,

with careful adjustment, you can use it to attenuate volume to keep levels low while still retaining the sound and feel of your cooking amp.

VERDICT

Fully versatile as an always-on tonal building block, a switched-in variation, or a combination of both (in comp-only or EQ-only mode), the Zenith could be the perfect complement to your guitar and amp, offering practical options to enhance your core sound. **G**

PROS Solid build quality; compact size; natural-sounding EQ with midrange options; smooth compression; substantial boost; OptoKick footswitch

CONS Nothing we can think of