

STAGE PRESENTS

DIGITECH HAS GONE BACK TO THE DRAWING BOARD FOR THIS EXCITING NEW RANGE OF STOMPBOXES. PAUL SALTER IS WIRED FOR SOUND

GBINFO

DIGITECH HARDWIRE SERIES

BUILT IN: USA
POWER: 9V battery or 9V DC mains adaptor (not included)
DIMENSIONS: 55(h) x 89(w) x 133(d) mm

CM-2 TUBE OVERDRIVE

PRICE: £99
TYPE: Overdrive
FEATURES: Level, low, high & gain controls, classic/modified switch

TL-2 METAL DISTORTION

PRICE: £99
TYPE: Distortion
FEATURES: Level, high/low, mid/freq & gain controls, tight/loose switch

DL-8 DELAY/LOOPER

PRICE: £149
TYPE: Delay/looper
FEATURES: Stereo/mono inputs & outputs, level, repeats, time & mode controls, 7 delay modes & loop function, tap tempo, internal tails on/off switch

CR-7 STEREO CHORUS

PRICE: £135
TYPE: Chorus
FEATURES: Stereo/mono inputs & outputs, level, speed, depth & mode controls, 7 chorus modes

RV-7 STEREO REVERB

PRICE: £149
TYPE: Reverb
FEATURES: Stereo/mono inputs & outputs, level, liveliness, decay & mode controls, 7 reverb modes, internal tails on/off switch

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**GUITAR BUYER
 BEST BUY!**

From the moment that a manufacturer finds its niche, you can be pretty sure that every product that follows will fit into it pretty well. Digitech hit a groove sometime around the creation of the innovative Whammy pedal almost two decades ago, and the Utah-based company has been pushing the boundaries of guitar effects ever since.

While probably best known for powerful multi-effects processors,

stand-alone pedals have always been part of the Digitech catalogue, from the aforementioned Whammy, the JamMan looper and HarmonyMan harmony generator to the Hendrix, Brian May and Eric Clapton artist modelling stompboxes. The quality of Digitech's digital effects technology has made huge strides in recent years, so we were rather excited to be handed this new range of Hardwire pedals, which promise to distil a choice selection of tones into a very gig-friendly stomp-able format.

CONSTRUCTION & FEATURES

These effects go by the full name of Hardwire Extreme Performance Pedals. Although the 'Extreme' tag puts us more in mind of snowboarding and sky diving than reliable gig performance, what Digitech means by this is that these pedals have been designed with live performance in mind. To this end, the men in white coats have tried to include all of the features that us guitarists want.

The first step that Digitech has

TWO THAT GOT AWAY

ELSEWHERE IN THE HARDWIRE RANGE...

There are two more Hardwire pedals that we've not mentioned here: the SC-2 Valve Distortion and the HT-2 Chromatic Tuner.

The SC-2 Valve Distortion has a similar layout to the CM-2 Tube Overdrive, with level, low, high and gain controls and a crunch/saturated mode switch, but offers a bit more gain, bridging the gap between the CM-2 Tube Overdrive and the TL-2 Metal Distortion. Meanwhile, the HT-2 Chromatic Tuner (pictured here) has an LED display with normal and strobe modes and an additional 'thru' output that is not muted when the tuner is turned on.

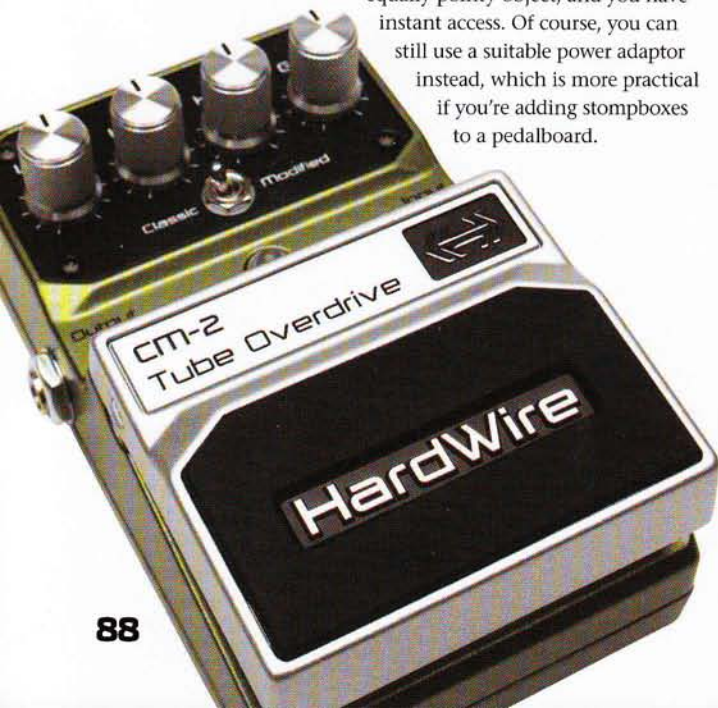


Like the rest of the range, it uses true-bypass switching. Both pedals cost £99.

"THE CM-2'S MODIFIED SETTING DELIVERS A SOARING LEAD TONE"

taken is to house the pedals in a tough and durable metal chassis. These boxes are just a little wider than Digitech's regular X Series pedals (or indeed the Boss compact pedals) and look very sturdy. One of the features that we liked on some of the more recent Digitech pedals is the way that the footswitch cover section can be removed for easy battery access.

Having to get a screwdriver out every time your 9V cell dies is a right pain, but in this case you just push in the pins at the hinge part of the pedal with the tip of your jackplug, or any equally pointy object, and you have instant access. Of course, you can still use a suitable power adaptor instead, which is more practical if you're adding stompboxes to a pedalboard.



Pushing in the pedal's hinge points gives access to the battery compartment



The CM-2 Tube Overdrive has two modes to choose from: classic and modified

Each pedal is also supplied with some useful accessories. If you are a pedalboard user, each Hardwire pedal comes with a bespoke velcro pad that attaches to the base. Another stick-on extra – a glow-in-the-dark sticker that goes on the footswitch section – will help you find the pedal on dark stages. Digitech has also considered another potentially embarrassing on-stage situation: accidentally knocking the controls with your foot so that you end up stomping into something totally inappropriate. The solution here is a heavy rubber block that fits over the controls so they can't be touched.

It's an ingenious solution that works perfectly and doesn't upset the knob positions as it's being applied either. While we're talking knobs, it's great to see that Digitech hasn't scrimped on the potentiometers. They feel really expensive in use, thanks to the solid,

graduated feel as you turn them. It's quality all the way as far as the construction goes, but all of this practical stuff will be for naught if the tones aren't there.

To this end, all of the Hardwire pedals use true-bypass switching so they shouldn't interfere with the signal when they're switched off, and Digitech has wrapped up some carefully considered tone-bending circuitry with an important feature when it comes to retaining the quality at stage volumes: plenty of headroom. This has been achieved by increasing the operating voltage, and as well as adding to the maximum volume this helps to avoid that 'sized-down' feel you can get with some stompboxes.

CM-2 TUBE OVERDRIVE

This increased sense of size really helps with the Tube Overdrive. It means that it feels more like the overdrive is coming from the amplifier itself rather than a pedal, and with an overdrive pedal that can really make or break the effect.

There are two modes to choose from: classic and modified. Classic brings that conventional overdrive style of clipping, where the tone of the guitar retains a lot of its natural qualities and to a certain extent you can control the level of the drive from your guitar's volume control. It's a pleasing overdrive with a warm basic tone that you can either fatten or brighten with the simple low and high controls, but we found that subtlety was the best option.



■ The TL-2's mid frequency control allows you to sculpt your driven tone in detail

"SOME OF THE BEST DELAYS WE'VE HEARD FROM A DIGITAL PEDAL IN A LONG TIME"

Switch over to the modified setting and a bit more treble, along with more gain, coaxes the pedal into delivering a soaring lead tone. That extra compression brings out some exciting, squeal-inducing, long-sustaining potential, all without losing the natural feel. It works great for boosting the front end of your valve amp too.

TL-2 METAL DISTORTION

There's a lot more tone-tweaking potential on offer from the Metal Distortion. With this kind of stompbox it's vital to get the mid-range right and retain plenty of low end, and here you get the high and low controls combined in one of the dual-concentric knobs while the mid-range level is bundled together with a mid-range frequency control on the other. This means that you can zero in on the precise area that you need to either scoop out for your chugging metal rhythm sound or boost for a monster lead tone.

Either way, you have a good amount of solid low-end to add that vital bass



thump to proceedings. The tight and loose switch takes this a step further, effectively giving you the option of a more moody style of metal tone such as early Sabbath or Queens of the Stone Age, or a tighter low end for pounding nu metal or a more punishing and extreme industrial tone.

DL-8 DELAY/ LOOPER

The DL-8 puts out some of the best delay sounds we've heard from a digital pedal in a long time. Not only do they sound and feel like they're coming from a very expensive piece of studio equipment, with next to no additional background noise, they're also very easy to set up. There are level, repeats and time controls – all of which are totally intuitive – and then a function switch that takes the pedal beyond straight digital delays into slapback, modulated and reverse delay and some very convincing analogue, 'lo-fi' and tape echo emulations. What's more, all of these delay modes

are available in both mono and stereo.

The quality remains well above impressive at all times, and you only need to hold down the footswitch for two seconds to engage the tap tempo mode and get those delays perfectly in time with the song. The additional loop mode offers up to 20 seconds of recording and is very easy to use. You can overdub loops but there's no way to undo or save them, and while this is a handy extra mode, big-time looper fans will still want to keep hold of their dedicated loop pedals.



GBVERDICT

DIGITECH HARDWIRE PEDALS

GOLD STARS

- ★ Hugely practical features
- ★ Excellent, easy to use effects
- ★ Low on noise, big on tone

BLACK MARKS

- None

IDEAL FOR...

Any gigging guitarist in need of some high-performance pedal power!

GBRATING



■ The level, speed and depth controls configure the different effect types

CR-7 STEREO CHORUS

The bog-standard chorus sound found in late-'80s multi-effects units and cheap pedals has been responsible for putting a lot of people off chorus as an effect. The CR-7 could well be the perfect antidote and just the device to win back the chorus-jaded.

Just as with the previous pedals, the effects are clean-sounding, robust and very reminiscent of good-quality rackmount gear. Best of all is the ability to be genuinely subtle without pushing the effect into the background. There are several effect types on offer, titled studio, multi, modern, boutique, analogue, jazz and vintage. All of these are easily

configured with the level, speed and depth controls.

If you're after very expansive effects, don't forget that this is a stereo pedal so you can set up two amps with just a touch of chorus for a ridiculously huge live sound. Similarly, you can inject it into two channels of your recording setup for some massive tones. It would have been nice to see some tremolo or rotary-style effects stuck in here too, but then again we wouldn't want to lose any of what's already included. It's all too good.

RV-7 STEREO REVERB

Stompbox-based reverb has always been one of the worst affected by the 'sound-shrinking' phenomenon of battery-based effects.

It's so great, then, to hear just how big the RV-7 can sound. Even if you choose to plug the pedal into the front of your amp rather than placing it in the effects loop, it sounds really excellent and the

options available exceed those of many a multi-effects unit.

The reverbs are actually licensed from top-notch studio gear manufacturer Lexicon, which comes as no surprise when you hear them. The spring reverb option includes all that extra mechanical detritus of the real thing, the gated reverb will surely have your drummer on his knees begging to borrow it for his snare, and the room, hall and plate varieties have a genuine sense of atmosphere

with complex-sounding and very realistic reflections. Even if your amp has a decent reverb, these studio-style effects are a great alternative.

You also get reverse and modulated settings for more adventurous reverb antics, but wherever that mode knob falls you'll have no problem tweaking the reverbs to taste with the simple level, liveliness (brightness, in other words) and decay knobs. Again, background noise is very low and the pedal sounds so lush that we'd very happily use it in a studio setting too – it's that impressive.



CONCLUSION

The popularity of 'boutique' pedals has meant that even the most respected mass-produced stompboxes have the prestige they once enjoyed. Some guitarists seem to feel that, unless their pedals have been built by a hermit in a cave using components reclaimed from pre-war radar equipment, they can't be any good.

This new range from Digitech does more than simply address some of the issues of large-scale production stompboxes – it knocks them out of the park. The Hardwire pedals boast full, detailed tones, very low background noise and excellent build quality (not to mention some ingenious accessories). The delay, chorus and reverb pedals in particular offer a broad range of really excellent sounds and must rank as some of the most powerful stand-alone pedals currently available. All of these things, together with some very competitive prices, put these Hardwire pedals firmly in our 'Best Buy' category. **GB**

