



## Radial Tonebone Trimode £269

### The rivals

Fulltone Fulldrive 2 £199  
Carl Martin Plexitone

£159  
Vox Cooltron Big Ben  
Overdrive £139

The Fulldrive 2 is the closest equivalent in terms of the tonal flexibility, but it lacks the valve. Similarly, the Plexitone is valveless, but goes one better than the Fulldrive by having three channels. The single-channel Cooltron pedal has a valve, but runs it at extremely low voltages, so don't expect the results to be exactly the same as the Trimode. Overdrive pedals all differ, so be prepared to shop around

Canada's Radial Engineering is behind the Tonebone range, and the new Trimode offers lots of flexibility by Adrian Clark

Based in British Columbia, Canada, Radial Engineering is no stranger to our review pages; we looked at the two original Tonebone overdrive pedals in issue 244. Since then, the product range has expanded considerably to cover various switching and FX loop management tools as well as overdrive pedals. This latest addition to the overdrive range is based on the original Tonebone Classic, but has twin channels for increased tonal versatility.

In terms of basic layout, the Trimode is exactly the same as the Classic, albeit with some controls duplicated for independent adjustment between the two channels. Each channel has an

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independent drive and level control and there's a three-position master switch for setting the basic range of gain within which the drive control works. At the 'low' setting, there's no extra gain added, while the 'mid' and 'high' settings add 9dB and 20dB respectively. Should you need even more control over the relative gain settings of the two channels, there's a tiny control (adjustable with a small cross-head screwdriver) recessed into the right side of the unit. This allows you to fine-

tune the distortion of channel one.

Most of the tone shaping controls cover both channels; the high and low controls are active, and can therefore both cut and boost at their respective frequencies (the 12 o'clock position is neutral) while the filter knob is described as an 'anti-presence' control, used to compensate for overly bright amplifiers. When turned up to the maximum, the control is removed from the signal chain, and high frequencies can be removed by turning the control





TONEBONE TRIMODE	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

■ **WE LIKED** A wide range of classic overdrive sounds

■ **WE DISLIKED** Apart from the vagaries of personal taste, nothing

anti-clockwise. The pedal's overall high frequency response can be adjusted with the top end switch. There are three positions here – 'flat' takes the switch out of the circuit, 'bright' adds a 6dB boost at 10kHz and 'dark' cuts by the same amount at 1.8kHz.

Then there's a separate mid boost switch for each channel, which is ideal for adding some extra mid-range to your lead sounds. The same frequency (390Hz) is boosted on both channels, but the amount of boost is different (here the user manual disagrees with the legend printed on the pedal's control panel). For channel one, the options are bypass, +4dB and +8dB, while the options for channel two are bypass, +7dB and +12dB.

Along with the mono input and output, there's an insert jack (for which you'll need a TRS insert cable) that allows you to add effects to the signal chain of channel two. And at the heart of the pedal's sound is the 12AX7 valve, which can easily be replaced if necessary.

**There's an impressive range of overdrive tones available, and it's hard to imagine getting a totally unusable tone out of it**

Unsurprisingly, battery power is not an option; a 15V DC adaptor is supplied.

**SOUNDS:** We already know the Tonebone Classic is a great-sounding overdrive pedal, so the main issue here was to listen to the differences in character between the two channels and assess the flexibility – especially for live use. To compare the basic sounds of the two channels, we set all global controls flat and set the drive and level controls the same for both channels. In the user manual, Radial describes channel one as 'rhythm' and channel two as 'lead', so we were initially confused to hear that channel one was considerably louder, but a quick tweak of the recessed drive gain control sorted that out. We adjusted it so the default volume level was identical for both channels, but you could just as well set it so channel one was quieter than channel two.

With this level playing field, channel two has a more pronounced mid-range character (even without the boost offered by the mid-range switch) suited to lead tones, while channel one has a tighter, more controlled character, in both mid-range and

bass. Adding the various EQ options opens up a huge range of tones – more than you'd imagine would be possible, and especially with so many simple three-position switches. Using the low and high knobs in conjunction with the

mid boost and top end switches, it's possible to cover most flavours of overdrive and distortion – even scooped metal sounds. At very low drive levels, you could even use one channel as a clean(-ish) EQ boost.

If you're just not into wussy clean boosts, though, you still won't be disappointed. Even at the middle setting on the drive gain switch, there's plenty of gain available for most rock and blues purposes; pushing the switch up to the highest position makes for a lovely thick, saturated distortion.

### Verdict

It's really up to you whether you use the Trimode as intended, with the three possible settings (bypass, rhythm, lead) or whether you choose to leave it switched on all the time as a twin-channel preamp. Either way, there's certainly an impressive range of overdrive tones available from the pedal, and it's hard to imagine getting a totally unusable tone out of it. The controls and switches are sensibly voiced to allow a wide range of adjustments that you can actually hear in operation, but without extending to ugly-sounding extremes. The price certainly isn't the lowest you're going to see for a twin-channel overdrive pedal, but it's not unreasonable. We've seen higher prices than this for much simpler pedals from some 'boutique' designers and in this case, you really do get what you pay for. **B**

### Tonebone Trimode

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

### TONEBONE TRIMODE

PRICE: £269

ORIGIN: Canada

TYPE: Two-channel valve overdrive pedal

FEATURES: True bypass, effects loop, 12AX7 valve

CONTROLS: Drive and level for each channel, high EQ, low EQ, filter; three-position mid boost switch for each channel, three-position drive gain switch, three-position top end switch; intermediate drive control (channel one only)

CONNECTIONS: In, out, effects loop (requires TRS insert cable)

MIDI: No

POWER: AC adaptor (included)

OPTIONS: None

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