STOMPBOX FEVER

RADIAL TONEBONE PLEXITUBE

The Tonebone gang has produced some absolutely raging pedals during the past few years, and the Switchbone and Tonebone Classic received GP Editors’ Pick Awards. One of the Tonebones we didn’t have a chance to knock around was the Hot British, which is designed to simulate the sound of a pixied Marshall. The new Tonebone Plexitube ($375 retail/$279 street) ups the “Brit” ante by offering two channels of Marshall roar, providing users with the opportunity to switch between the pedal’s rhythm and lead sounds, as well as bypass the ‘bone entirely to drop back to your amp’s tone (or a direct sound if you’re interfacing the Plexitube with your home-studio gear). While a street price zooming two Harltons under $300 may be a stiff tariff for a non-vintage, non-boutique distortion pedal, the Plexitube delivers an almost recording-studio level of tone-shaping in a box that’s tough enough to withstand being used as a trampoline by a Triceratops.

I auditioned the Plexitube through a Mesa/Boogie Stiletto using a variety of humbucker- and single-coil-equipped guitars. My studio tests revealed the Plexitube is capable of generating enough output to launch the space shuttle, as it almost melted my digital preamps and interfaces when the pedal’s Level and Drive were maxed. The Stiletto was more forgiving—and the resulting lead-channel boost catapulted solos way out in front of the band mix—but you should monitor signal-chain levels with care when working with recording interfaces and digital gear.

The Plexitube’s EQ armory is extensive. My preferred methodology was to dial in my amp tone to taste, and then utilize the Plexitube’s controls to fine tune the sound to address the needs of different environments. Although the frequencies are preset (Mid Boost High is +12dB @ 620Hz, Mid Boost Medium is +7dB @ 390Hz, High EQ is +10dB @ 4.3kHz, Low EQ is ±14.5dB @ 100Hz, Top End Bright is +6dB @ 10kHz, Top End Dark is -6dB @ 1.8kHz, and so on), the pedal never failed to give me the impact and punch I desired—even when moving from a cavernous studio to a tiny stage in a crowded bar. The controls are also highly interactive, and clicking on, say, a Medium Mid Boost can increase your overall level along with the midrange enhancement.

The sounds on this puppy are tremendous—very organic and powerful. You can’t really get a clean kerrang—even with the master Drive set to its minimum (you’ll need to turn down your guitar volume for those sounds)—but every flavor from the Who, AC/DC, Kiss, Green Day, Slipknot, and beyond is present and accounted for. Hum and hiss were audible whenever I switched to the lead channel, but as it sounded like a high-power tube amp at full bore, the noise seemed appropriate to me.

The only thing to add is that this pedal totally rocks in a big way. I would have dug a dedicated Drive knob for the lead channel rather than a “trim adjust” that requires a tool, but that’s a trifle. My favored Plexitube move was setting my Stiletto for a clean sound, and then using the pedal’s rhythm channel for a Mick Ralphs-like tone, and the lead channel for a soaring Mick Ronson-like overdrive with enough boost to command the stage—along with a delay and wah connected through the Plexitube’s very handy lead-channel effects loop. Having a distortion pedal with so much firepower is an almost giddy joy, and the Plexitube’s bally tones and versatile tweakability earn it an Editors’ Pick Award. —Michael Molenda