



ROCKER CHIC

PAUL SALTER PUTS HIS BEST FOOT FORWARD WITH SOME FUNKY NEW TREADLE PEDALS FROM GIG-FX

... The psychology of guitar effects would make a weird and wonderful subject for study. There's an almost primal urge that can be satisfied by pressing buttons, twisting knobs and making things light up that surely goes back to those cot-side toys of infancy. The noises we make would probably reveal more about our inner selves to a psychologist than any number of Rorschach inkblots and word association tests.

Part of the reason our choice of effects can be so revealing is that the choice is so vast. At one end of the scale are the familiar, conventional choices, and at the other end lurk the wild, the wacky and the downright alarming. Firmly in the latter camp is the range of stompboxes made by US-based Gig-fx. You'll probably have heard of the versatile Mega-Wah, but

the Gig-fx range has recently been expanded to include three more varied stompboxes – if you thought that stand-alone rocker-style pedals were just about wah and volume, check this lot out.

CONSTRUCTION & FEATURES

While most rocker-based pedal manufacturers seem content to draw on the classic Vox Wah and Dunlop Crybaby construction style, the offerings from Gig-fx are based on a refreshingly different design. The most obvious deviation from the conventional pedal concept is the unusually shaped rocker section itself. This might appear to be just a whim on the part of Gig-fx to give its products a strong visual identity, but it's actually a clever piece of design. That exaggerated capital letter 'T' that you step on is cast in aluminium, and

is very strong and twist-resistant. Despite the unusual shape, it feels pretty good in use – all the foot pressure you need to apply is at the regular-width sections at the front and back – and the top surface is dressed with a grippy grade of rubber to keep all but the smoothest-soled shoes in place. The rest of the chassis is also formed from aluminium, so these stompers have a durable air about them and weigh around the same as conventional wah pedals.

The inputs and outputs are sensibly placed up at the top end of the units, and the base is cushioned by a section of thick rubber at each end of the chassis. All three pedals can be powered by a standard 9V DC centre-negative adaptor, and there's also room for a 9V battery, which can be accessed by removing the four screws that hold the battery compartment cover in place.

GBINFO

gig-fx

GIG-FX PEDALS

BUILT IN: China
POWER: 9V battery or 9V DC mains adaptor (not supplied)
DIMENSIONS: 80(h) x 100(w) x 230(d) mm
WEIGHT: 1.1kg (2.3lbs)

KILO-WAH

PRICE: £144.99
TYPE: Multi-wah stompbox
FEATURES: 4-way mode switch, auto-wah rate control

PRO-CHOP

PRICE: £229.99
TYPE: Modulation stompbox
FEATURES: 4-way mode switch, 'chop' ratio & rate controls, 'pan/trem' depth & rate controls, 2 x preset/pedal switches, MIDI input, LCD display

VOD

PRICE: £164.99
TYPE: Variable distortion stompbox
FEATURES: 3-band EQ, 3 x split-shaft gain/level controls

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FRESH FX

GOOD IDEAS, EXECUTED WITH STYLE

■ Many pedal-based effects follow existing designs, with some modifications to give them a slightly different style.

These pedals from Gig-fx have a great sense of individuality about them, both in the sounds they produce and the way that they look and operate. This US-based company puts a lot of effort

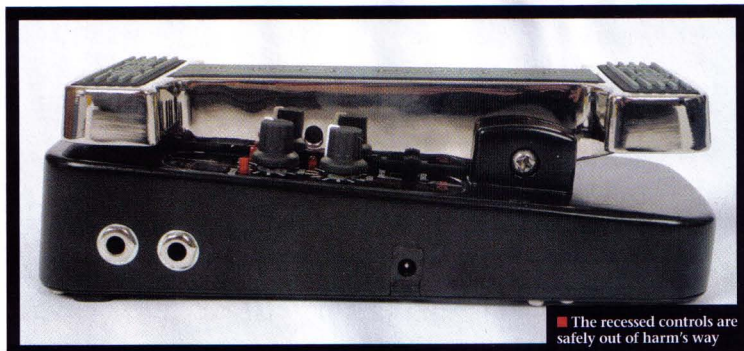
into its products, a fact that shows in the quality of the cast chassis, which are built from aircraft-grade aluminium, and aspects like the low background noise and silent optical switching. They're aiming for the pro and working musician with these pedals, and we reckon that they've hit that target with ease.



"THESE GIG-FX PEDALS BRING A WHOLE LOAD OF INSPIRATION TO THE PARTY"



■ The Pro-Chop, the most complex of these effects, is bristling with knobs and switches



■ The recessed controls are safely out of harm's way

Most of us love the look of the traditional wah pedal, but adding features and functions to that kind of chassis often brings up some practical problems – not least that knobs and switches end up being very vulnerable when positioned on the sides of the unit. Chalk up one more plus for the Gig-fx design here, as the shape of the pedal allows all manner of knobs and switches to be positioned on the top of the main body. This puts them in easy reach for those on-stage tweaks, but also well out the way of clumsy feet.

These pedals don't employ true-bypass switching, but the people at Gig-fx are at pains to stress that your signal will be unaffected when the pedals are switched off. When they're turned on, the effects might be digitally controlled, but the signal path is all analogue. Using a buffered bypass also means that effects can be switched in and out silently, with no loud pops, as can happen with true-bypass stud switches. The switching mechanism is rather unusual in that it uses an optical linkage in place of any physical switch.

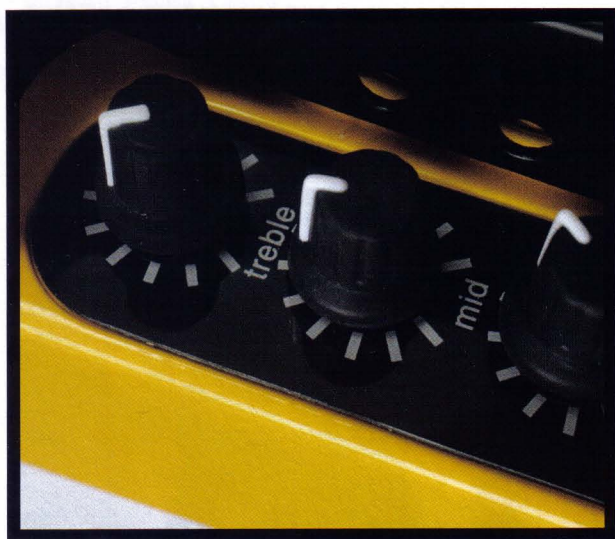
In the case of each of these three pedals, the effect is bypassed when the rocker is in the fully-up, heel-down position. Gig-fx has built in a small delay before the switching kicks in to

avoid the effect cutting out every time you sweep back to the start of the pedal's travel – you have to hold it there a moment. The same delay is there when you're engaging the effect too, so the pedal feels a little slow to react at these points. We're talking less than a second here, but it does feel a little off-putting. It's doubtless something you can get used to and work around, but we'd question what actual advantage this system has over the switching system in a Dunlop Crybaby wah, for example. With a conventional physical switch that requires a little extra pressure to trigger, there's no delay and you're in no doubt over whether you've turned the thing on or off.

SOUNDS – KILO-WAH

The number of knobs and switches on these pedals should give you a clue about just what they can do. The Kilo-Wah is perhaps the least generously endowed of the bunch, but there's still loads on offer from the mode selection switch, with some modest extra help coming in the shape of the rate control.

The mode switch has four settings, the first of which is labelled 'Cry' – no prizes for guessing why. Anyone



fond of the classic Crybaby wah pedal should be quite pleased with the effect here. If anything, this mode is a little sweeter-sounding than most wah pedals, with a nice usable sweep that stays within the pleasant range, not getting too muffled or piercing at either extreme. The next setting, the 'Mega' mode, is borrowed from the Gig-fx Mega-Wah, and brings in an extra load of bass for a larger sweep and consequently more murkiness potential.

The remaining two auto-wah modes just use the rocker as a giant on/off

switch, which feels like a bit of a missed opportunity – surely there's some other parameter we could be given to control? The 'Trig' mode provides a triggered wah sound – in other words, each note triggers a wah sweep – a lot like an envelope filter effect. This works well, and adjusting the strength of your pick attack shapes the extent of the simulated sweep of the effect in a very expressive manner.

Compared with the other three effects, the final 'Auto' mode is pretty uninspiring. Here the rate control is used to set the tempo of the automatic wah sweeps – we imagine we could have had a lot of fun using the treadle to set the rate instead, but never mind. This mode works perfectly well, but it's a bit inflexible and limited in its potential applications. In general, the Kilo-Wah works well positioned on either side of an overdrive pedal, and the active bypass doesn't colour your guitar's tone to any noticeable degree.

SOUNDS – PRO-CHOP

The Pro-Chop is the top-of-the-range new big brother to the Gig-fx Chopper pedal. It's a dual-oscillator tremolo with a range of effects that go way beyond the remit of a conventional tremolo pedal. As part of this rhythmic pulse-fest, Gig-fx has included MIDI compatibility. Hook the Pro-Chop up to your drum machine or digital recording setup and the MIDI clock signal will automatically control the rate of the chosen effect – easy as that. If you prefer the manual route, your first port of call is the mode selector switch on the unit's right-hand side.

This knob is labelled 'Chop', 'Blend', 'Shake' and 'Stir', and as such looks a little like it came from a spare parts bin at the Moulinex factory. 'Chop' is a square-wave tremolo effect, so the signal from your guitar will alternate between on and off – think of the stuttering guitar sounds featured on certain R.E.M. and Green Day tracks. It's a really useful tool to bring out when the ideas are a bit thin on the ground, turning bland chord progressions into spectacular rhythmic events. Plug a second amp into the stereo output, and your sound will jump from one amp to the other in time with the tremolo. It's a huge sound that's quite different from regular panning, and can be pretty



disorienting at certain speeds (handily shown on the LCD display as a frequency or BPM value).

The 'Stir' mode is a more standard panning effect when used in stereo, and behaves like a normal, smooth tremolo effect when used in mono. The range it covers is enormous though. The depth of the tremolo is set using a dedicated knob, while the rate can be controlled by the rate knob or the treadle.

The 'Shake' and 'Blend' modes provide two different ways to combine the effects of the 'Chop' and 'Stir' modes, with each offering a slightly differently voiced blend of stereo pan and tremolo. The effects on offer here sound a lot like the intro to 'Won't Get Fooled Again' by The Who, which, incidentally, was also the inspiration for the Gig-fx boffins when creating the Pro-Chop. Both 'Shake' and 'Blend' modes can be controlled from the pedal or by switching in the relevant controls, and consequently you can have loads of fresh-sounding effects at your fingertips.

The blend of effects can often be hard to characterise, but this is one of those devices that was made to fiddle with and glory in the results of your tweaking. However, we should point out that if you don't use a stereo setup on stage or in the studio, you won't get the full benefit.

SOUNDS – VOD

In essence, the VOD is three overdrive pedals in one. The three levels of distortion on offer share a three-band EQ section, but each one has individual level and gain controls. ➔

■ For an idea of what the Pro-Chop sounds like in stereo mode, listen to The Who's 'Baba O'Riley' or 'Won't Get Fooled Again'

... DETAILS

CLEVERLY DESIGNED OLD-SCHOOL EFFECTS WITH A MODERN TWIST



■ It's pretty clear where Gig-fx got the inspiration behind the 'Cry' wah mode...



■ The Pro-Chop has some unusual-sounding options – but then, it's an unusual effect



■ LEDs light up on the VOD to show at a glance what level of distortion you're at



GBOPINION

GIG-FX PEDALS

GOLD STARS

- ★ Original effects
- ★ Innovative take on a traditional design

BLACK MARKS

- Awkward battery access
- Delay when bypassing the effects

IDEAL FOR...

Anyone who's looking for something familiar, but very different

Rather than using the pedal action to control a single parameter (as in a volume pedal or conventional wah), the treadle functions instead as a large three-position switch, stepping through the three increasingly aggressive drive stages.

There's plenty of gain available from all three of the distortion modes, but there's a progressively edgier feel as you cycle through the settings. The intended milder drive is very smooth, working wonderfully at lower levels of gain for gritty chords that clean up nicely with a softer touch. You do need to spend some time with the EQ however, as it's all active and can sound peaky if you don't balance things out – the interaction between the treble and middle needs particular care to keep things from sounding too artificial, but it seems that the best results come with the EQ controls near their mid points anyway.

The heavier of the two modes will cover many of the needs of the more aggressive player, from Sabbath-like rhythm tones to screaming high-gain leads that'll sustain for days. The VOD manages the whole range with good

definition and manages to avoid swamping the guitar's tone, so Gig-fx deserves praise for this aspect alone. If you have something like a solid-state amp with limited distortion capabilities, you could just set up the amp for a clean tone and achieve your whole range of overdrive from this single source, and probably be quite happy about it.

We should mention at this point that our review sample is set up so that, rather than bypassing the effect completely as it should, the pedal's heel-down position actually brings in the lowest of the three drive levels. It's annoying not to have it work right out of the box, but the manual has easy instructions for putting this right by re-calibrating the optical switch without too much hassle.

GBRATINGS

GIG-FX PEDALS

BUILD QUALITY	★★★★☆
FEATURES	★★★★☆
SOUNDS	★★★★☆
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★☆
GBVERDICT	★★★★☆

GBCONCLUSION

INSPIRING PEDALS WITH A BRILLIANT VISUAL VIBE

■ In a marketplace crowded with lookalike stompboxes all providing very similar effects, these offerings from Gig-fx are a real breath of fresh air.

They're pretty much unique in terms of features, and once you become familiar with what they're capable of, it's clear that they're made by people who know about guitars and effects. The standard of construction is high throughout, and we found all three very easy to use, with the slight caveat that the optical switching system takes some getting used to. More importantly, they provide great effects that really deliver the goods, and in the case of the Pro-Chop in particular, bring a whole load of inspiration to the party too. Great stuff. **GB**