

Gig-fx Chopper

Tremolo pedal

This new pedal from US company Gig-fx certainly stands out from the stomp box crowd, but does it sound as different as it looks?

Roger Cooper

Gig-fx are an American company that follow the well-proven route of combining US design with Chinese manufacture. The brand name appears on a small selection of very distinctive-looking, treadle-operated stompboxes, and the intriguingly titled Chopper has been chosen for this review.

On most treadle pedals the rocking platform part usually occupies the entire upper area, so any additional controls have to be located on the casing sides, leaving them very exposed to knocks and possible damage. But, by employing a very clever piece of lateral thinking, Gig-fx have neatly bypassed any such problems.

On the Chopper and its other pedal pals, the treadle features a full footprint at each end as normal, but the sides have been cut away to leave just a slim centre section. This creates a capital 'Y' outline that exposes enough open space on the casing top to site any necessary extra knobs. This re-shaped treadle section is chunky and deep, so controls are snugly recessed and out of harm's way. The overall operating area stays the same, so it feels the same underfoot and works just as well. Of course, this neat design idea also results in a radically different appearance that's tailor-made for the marketing department.

The Chopper's metal casing is a little larger than that employed by the average treadle pedal, while the cast aluminium rocker section is suitably rigid despite its reduced proportions. The top surface features grippy rubber sections, while chunky equivalents on the underside exert similar friction. This resistance to unwanted movement is very necessary in view of the Chopper's stiffer-than-usual operating action.

The battery compartment on the base is accessed via a somewhat fiddly four-screw cover, and the requisite 9V power can also be supplied by an appropriate wall-wart via the usual centre-negative socket. The latter is side-mounted, as are the input jack and its opposite left (mono) and right (stereo) outputs. Gig-fx recommend using both outputs to provide the most ear-catching results, using the Chopper with two amps or PA channels.

Effects are engaged when the treadle is depressed and they're bypassed when this is fully back, all achieved automatically courtesy

of a wear-free and noiseless optical switch. The method comes with a brief built-in delay before switching takes place, and this entails holding the treadle in place for an instant. It's not long, but the procedure is a little off-putting at first.

Controls

Gig-fx make good use of the upper deck, cramming in no fewer than seven controls, all with more than enough room to manoeuvre. The Chop shop comes left of centre, comprising Ratio and Rate pots, a Preset/Pedal switch, plus a red indicator LED. Over on the right is the Pan/Trem section, with Depth and Rate controls, attendant green LED and another Preset/Pedal selector. Sited above these is a rotary, four-position Mode switch, providing the intriguing choice of Chop, Blend, Shake or Stir.

For 'Chop', read 'Tremolo', which ranges from a short and speedy staccato beat to a longer throb, with effect depth and speed governed respectively by the relevant Ratio and Rate controls. Using two amps, the sound jumps from one to the other as the signal alternates left and right.

Stir means auto-panning when employed in a stereo situation, becoming a smooth-style tremolo for mono purposes. The Depth and Rate controls provided on the Pan/Trem side determine the degree and speed of the effect.

The Blend and Shake modes offer two differing permutations of the previous selections. Blend combines Chop with a cyclical pan, but both operate independently and all controls involved can be varied individually. The Shake option adds an out-of-phase signal to this already wide-ranging aural mix, allowing even more extreme sonic mangling.

The Preset/Pedal slide switches offer a choice of controlling Chop or Pan speed. When in the Preset position this parameter is governed by the appropriate Rate pot, while selecting Pedal for either puts treadle operation in charge. Visual indication of the results is provided by the



attendant colour-coded LEDs, which accordingly flash in time.

Conclusion

As can be seen from the description of what all these controls can do, the Chopper will be at its best when working in stereo via two amplifiers or similarly independent signal paths.

With such a setup, the range of original, big-sounding effects that can be obtained from this one pedal is impressively vast. It lends itself to aural experimentation, and the results of such time-based tweaking can be truly entertaining, not to mention inspirationally creative.

Like the other effects in the Gig-fx line, this isn't a low-budget pedal; either in design, construction, performance or price, but obviously its Chinese origin helps make the latter more manageable. Any player fancying something that goes beyond a little bit different, in terms of looks as well as sound, would do well to check out what Gig-fx has to offer, and the highly individual Chopper is an excellent place to start. ■ **PM**

Performing Musician

Gig-fx Chopper £179

This is a well-designed and solidly built treadle-equipped effects pedal that offers something out of the ordinary, in both appearance and performance. It isn't cheap, but neither is the quality.

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