

EFFECTRODE PC-2A PHOTO-OPTICAL TUBE COMPRESSOR



The latest pedal from the valve enthusiasts at Effectrode is a studio-style compressor. David Greeves is feeling the squeeze

Effectrode's range of high-quality valve-powered pedals has grown steadily from the original Vibe and Phaseomatic Deluxe to include chorus, tremolo and overdrive units. The latest box of tricks is a photo-optical compressor, presented in a smaller enclosure and built around a subminiature valve. With audiophile-grade components and a completely Class-A signal path promising smooth studio-style compression and exceptional sound quality, the PC-2A has a lot to live up to if it's to match its predecessors.

Construction & Features

If existing Effectrode pedals such as the Tube-Vibe and Phaseomatic Deluxe have a down side, it's that they are rather large by stompbox standards, incorporating as they do two to three standard-sized dual-triode valves. This latest pedal manages to stay much smaller partly by employing a NOS ('new old stock'), military-spec, subminiature 6021 valve. Running this valve at the proper high plate voltage requires the use of a 12V DC mains adaptor, helpfully included with the pedal, while a series of small holes on either side of the casing allow heat to escape.

Another crucial component of the PC-2A is its photo-optical gain reduction circuit. More often associated with rackmount studio compressors, this design uses a light source coupled with a photo-sensitive resistor to

dictate the attack and release characteristics of the compressor.

You might already be getting the sense that this pedal is a far cry from the majority of stompbox compressors, most of which are derived from the classic Ross and MXR Dyna Comp designs and are based around an op-amp chip. This is not the only optical compressor pedal on the market, of course, but in creating it, designer Phil Taylor has looked beyond the guitar world and taken inspiration from the legendary Teletronix LA-2A studio compressor, which has been around since the '60s and has been used on countless records through the years.

For all this sophistication, the PC-2A is very simple to use, with controls for peak reduction and gain, plus a mini-switch marked 'limit', which lets you switch from a softer, smoother low compression ratio to a higher ratio for a more pronounced limiting effect. The felt pads at the base of these knobs are a nice touch and confirm our impression that the attention to detail and quality of components used here are absolutely first class.

Sounds

We're expecting warm, natural, studio-style compression from this pedal, and that's exactly what we get. Indeed, this is one of the quietest, sweetest-sounding compressor pedals we have heard. The inherent principal of compression – raising the overall signal level while reducing the loudest bits – will always have the side effect of raising what is known as the 'noise floor', but here the

signal is rich, clear and transparent with scarcely any additional background noise.

Unlike some compressors, where you have to balance separate controls for the amount of compression and the amount of 'make-up gain', here the peak reduction knob seems to do both. This means that you don't have to constantly readjust the gain knob as you increase the amount of squash. Instead, it allows the gain control to be used to set the overall output level and even provide a healthy volume boost should you wish.

With peak reduction set fairly low, the PC-2A has a marvelously natural fattening effect, making each note seem fuller while preserving the attack. Turn up further and the compression effect becomes more obvious, though it is still remarkably musical with no unpleasant 'pumping'. Flick the switch to 'limit' mode and the character changes, with a far more overt squash should you prefer that type of effect.

Conclusion

There are many ways to use a compressor, from simply boosting the level of your signal and fattening up your sound to enhancing sustain or delivering a more overt squishiness to suit funk and country, and in every respect this pedal excels. Even set against competing optical compressors, such as the excellent Diamond Compressor, the PC-2A more than holds its own, making it a serious proposition for anyone seeking the very best in smooth, studio-style compression. **GB**



EFFECTRODE PC-2A

Price: £229

Built in: UK

Type: Optical valve compressor

Features: Peak reduction & gain controls, limit/compress switch, internal attack trimpot

Power: 12V DC mains adaptor only (included)

Dimensions: 52(h) x 95(w) x 128(d) mm

CONTACT DETAILS

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GB VERDICT

GOLD STARS

- ★ Very high build quality
- ★ Quiet and transparent
- ★ Extremely musical compression
- ★ 'Limit' mode adds versatility

BLACK MARKS

- None

IDEAL FOR...

Anyone seeking a high-quality pedal for studio-style compression

GB RATING

