





Effectrode Fire Bottle Magnetic Pickup Booster & PC-2A Compressor

£189 & £229

Even the modest pedals on your 'board can benefit from quality components and expert design *by Adrian Clark*

Effectrode's pedals are built in the USA, but its 'effects scientist' Phil Taylor is based here in the UK. The company has an ever-growing range of valve-driven stompboxes, with an emphasis on overdrive, boost and the 'classic' range of modulation effects: phase, chorus, tremolo and Univibe-style rotary speaker emulation. We've previously looked at the Tube Drive, Tube Vibe and Phaseomatic, but these two new additions represent a change in design approach for the company.

While previous Effectrode pedals were chunky beasts, these two are just slightly larger than your average stompbox. To continue with the valve theme, these pedals use the 6112 dual triode – a tiny 'subminiature' valve once used as a proximity trigger in WW2 anti-aircraft shells!

Both pedals have a rugged, all-steel chassis, with all connections on the rear edge to maximise 'board space. As with all Effectrode pedals, both come with a 12-volt power supply – because of the voltages required to drive the valves, batteries aren't up to the job.

Fire Bottle

So what is a Magnetic Pickup Booster? Well, the Fire Bottle works on three aspects of your guitar's sound: the resonant frequency, the gain and the tone. The pickup's resonant frequency (and the size of that frequency's peak) plays a major part in creating the trademark sound of a guitar: consider the high resonant frequency and high peak on a Strat, compared with the lower frequency and peak on a Les Paul.

To adjust the gain and tone, the Fire Bottle has the standard pair of controls. Up to a

whopping 30dB of gain is available, and the tone circuit is based on the classic Fender Harvard circuit from the Tweed era. The third element in the Fire Bottle's sound is the Vari-Z resonance switch, designed to work primarily with single-coil pickups. By lowering the resonant frequency by 2-3kHz, this is designed to give more of a 'vintage humbucker' tone.

Sounds

Appropriately starting with a Strat plugged into a squeaky clean Fender amp and initially ignoring the gain knob, we hear a variety of tones just by combining the tone control and vari-z switch; while the latter is purely for thickening the Strat's single-coil tone, the tone control has plenty of scope for adding brightness. This is never a harsh, brittle effect though – it's like an instant

The Bottom Line

PC-2A Compressor

Rothwell's **Love Squeeze** (£129) is probably the closest alternative to the PC-2A. It also has a fast attack and warm tone, and can be used without compression as a buffer pedal. The **HBE Compressor Retro** (£129) is in the same ballpark, and for an ultra-transparent alternative, the **Telenordia TK-23** (£179) is excellent.

Fire Bottle

Good luck getting hold of **D*A*M's** pedals, but its **Red Rooster** (£175) is an old-style treble booster, but with a range control to adjust the frequency of the boost. For something more like the Fire Bottle, try the **Fulltone Fat Boost** (£145) or **Carl Martin Contour And Boost** (£149). The latter has independent high-and low-pass filters.

supply of increased Fender twang!

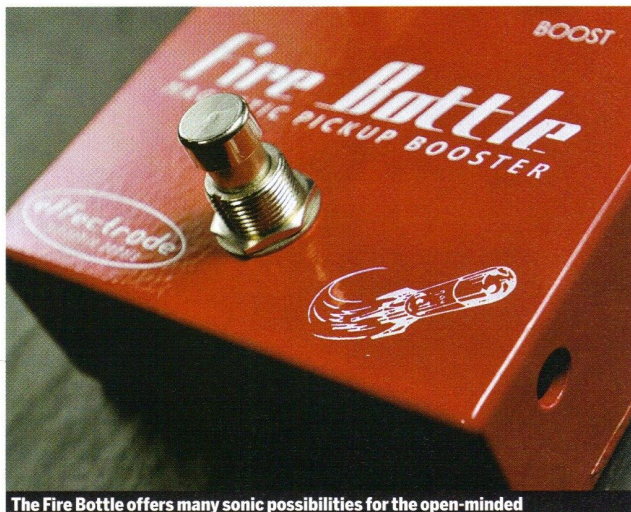
Using the gain control on its own makes the pedal perfect as a simple boost, when you just want more of your current sound. At the maximum setting, our shy, retiring amp now barks like an enraged Rottweiler. Whether you do this will be down to your personal taste – using the Fire Bottle as the only source of distortion makes for quite a 'scratchy' sound; we prefer a bit of amp crunch to start with.

Although no pedal will ever turn a single-coil into a humbucker, you can certainly get some great sounds with the vari-z switch. At quite high gain settings it makes for some lovely thick solo sounds on the bridge pickup, and even some passable jazz tones on the neck pickup with a clean amp sound, cutting the tone on the pedal and adding the vari-z feature.

PC-2A Compressor

In keeping with the audiophile design ethic of Effectrode pedals, the PC-2A is inspired by one of the finest compressors ever made, the legendary LA-2A studio compressor.





The Fire Bottle offers many sonic possibilities for the open-minded

Although the LA-2A was designed to cope with a lot more than just electric guitar, Phil Taylor realised that the fast attack of its photo-resistive circuitry would make it ideal as the basis for a guitar pedal.

With a simpler layout than many compressor pedals, the PC-2A has just two controls. The peak reduction knob performs two functions: setting the ratio (the amount of compression) and the threshold (the point at which the input gain triggers the compressor). The gain knob then boosts the signal to make up for the effect of compression, although it can also be used to add extra valve boost. The limit/compress switch changes the nature of compression; in limiter mode the compression ratio is much higher and more noticeable.

Sounds

It's difficult to describe a compressor's sound, because so much of its value lies in what it removes from your sound. However, the PC-2A does have a recognisable voice, adding smoothness and warmth. Compared with many vintage-flavoured compressors, the attack is very fast, in keeping with the LA-2A heritage.

Meanwhile, the release is barely noticeable in standard compression mode. According to the manual, the photocell has a natural two-stage decay shape; after 40-80 milliseconds it reaches half of its initial resistance, and then the rest of the recovery can take up to several seconds, depending on the intensity of the previous

signal. In practice, and to our ears, this makes for a very enjoyable pedal to use. Even with maximum gain reduction, it's easy to forget that the pedal is there at all... until you turn it off and realise how dynamically ragged your playing is without it!

The Limiter setting on the mini toggle switch is probably going to be less useful for most guitarists, but for times when you need some serious squashing, it has an even warmer, smoother sound than the other mode.

Verdict

We've never yet been disappointed by the sound quality of an Effectrode pedal, and these two are really excellent. Of the two, the Fire Bottle requires the most careful tweaking; as we said, using it to provide maximum drive on a clean amp can be a little harsh, so you'd need to consider your precise gain needs and set the various components accordingly. It's not the same as an overdrive pedal, so it takes an open mind to see the possibilities... of which there are many.

Compressors tend to be considered superfluous by many guitarists, but there's so much to be gained by using one, especially on clean-toned parts. The PC-2A isn't one of the lazy, squishy compressors that we've seen from several 'boutique' builders, it's far more crisp and precise, but it does add a wonderful warmth to your tone, as well as obvious audiophile quality. **A**

The Bottom Line

Fire Bottle

We like: Broad palette of rich valve boost tones

We dislike: Maybe a tad harsh on high boost settings

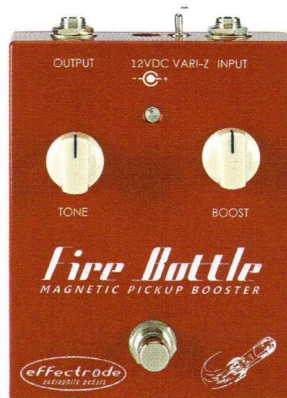
Guitarist says: An interesting, good-sounding pedal that's ideal for expanding a single-coil-equipped guitar

PC-2A Compressor

We like: Audibly high quality compression in a stompbox

We dislike: There's nothing to dislike here

Guitarist says: Studio audiophile quality valve compression in a stompbox. Very nice!



Effectrode Fire Bottle

PRICE: £189

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Magnetic Pickup Booster

FEATURES: Fully valve-powered

CONTROLS: Tone, boost, resonance switch

CONNECTIONS: Input, output

MIDI: No

POWER: DC adaptor (supplied)

OPTIONS: None

Cranes Music

0292 039 8215

www.effectrode.com



Effectrode PC-2A Compressor

PRICE: £229

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Photo-optical Compressor pedal

FEATURES: Fully valve-powered

CONTROLS: Peak reduction, gain, compressor/limiter switch

CONNECTIONS: Input, output

MIDI: No

POWER: DC adaptor (supplied)

OPTIONS: None

Test results

Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Test results

Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★