

FRANTONE

I found in the Cupboard Of Despair a no-name tremolo, picked up 19 years ago somewhere unmemorable in L.A.. Tremolo. The only effect with true, historic cred. The only tempo based effect you don't want to force into a user's orifice after two minutes. The first extra knobs on an amp. You took your guitar, your misery, and your amp down to Main Street, cut a deal with the liquor store for a power socket, fired up the amp, put on your Ray-Bans and your tremolo, complained loudly and pentatonically about spousal abuse, and soon enough you had a crowd glugging on brown bags, coins chinking into your guitar case and the liquor store cash-box. Maybe life wasn't so bad. A chorus doesn't have that long, long track, it's just a no'count white boy dressed up like a lady, and a phaser chews with its mouth open so good folks leave the table. Trem is real, and viable solo. My No-Name, like a lot of people, got louder when turned on, so I had to use a volume pedal, and found a taped back together Bespeco in the Cupboard Of Despair – it still worked after a collision with a flight case, but now needed cleaning. The cleaning fluids half-dissolved the bandaging tape tack, so the effort became very slimy. I scrubbed it off my hands and started looking for a more serious tremolo.

The Frantone Vibutron, warm, beautifully balanced, lovely paint job, elegantly made to the most obsessive audiophile standards, £325 in Vintage and Rare Guitars London, and now, unsurprisingly, discontinued as a production item, but still custom orderable from www.frantone.com. Way too much money for me. The Red Witch Pentavocal Trem, a “very unique piddle” as described and demonstrated by its New Zealand maker Ben Fulton at www.redwitchanalogpedals.com. Its interesting feature is a control that takes the trem effect out of the treble yet leaves it still going in the lower frequencies. I wondered if it could be the other way around to suit finger-style and give a firm thumb against shimmering fingers.



I ordered a Swamp Thang tremolo which promptly disappeared into the US office problem, but an Effectrode Delta-Trem

was racing me to a studio in Cornwall where I planned to make experimentally loud noises. The Delta-Trem is gorgeous. Inevitably really – the original was tubes, this is twin tubes and has its own Swiss Army knife Stontronics 100-240 volts switch mode p.s.u. – you can plug it in pretty much anywhere the road might take you.

DELTA



The tremolo does the old mono sound perfectly – a softly curving, warm-skin and cotton knickers LFO, and it does stoner trips in stereo. I need a traditional sound with two or three

speed variations to sit in different tempi without clashing, and maybe a variation in depth here and there – extreme effects don't sit well with solo guitar unless a whole piece is written around them. So at first sight there's actually too much pedal here for me on the fly-drive road if I take an amp, but for a pedals-only flight it's high on the short-list, and there's clearly recording potential, plus the spaced-out hippy stereo function. The manual does its best to guide us through the way the controls interact, narrowly avoiding a syntactical disaster, and doesn't make a lot of sense until you've sat and twiddled. Effectrode eventually give up trying to explain and say “This interaction of controls can be challenging to begin with, however it does allow for a wealth of tremolo options”. Read this as hours of absorbing messing about with independent tremolos on each side of the pan as the depth and speed controls turn into separate left and right LFO speed controls – you can set say, a fast wobble on the right against a slow surge on the left, or maybe enough waltz on the left and polka on the right to completely demolish a Siege of Ennis set dance.

DELIVERANCE

There appeared a thread on a UK guitar newsgroup, about a Peavey Nano Valve amp which seemed to be getting jobbed off cheap. I checked out the specs - 11”x11”x 6”, one 12AX7 and one EL84, one input, one knob, and a mains plug. It looked interesting, and small enough to travel. I rang Peavey EU artist relations, and they said I could have a look at one if I promised to feed back a detailed A/B Nano Valve versus the Joe Satriani range's JSX Mini Colossal, which looked like the same spec in a bigger box, with a trem, and a power soak for playing dirty without hacking off your mum. There was a pic of Joe holding it out with one hand, so I promised. The A/B was easy, I phoned it in “... I'm not sending the Nano Valve back but I just tripped over the JSX”. The Nano Valve is tiny and magical. I replaced the stiff-coned Made In Hurri stock speaker with a Celestion PG8A which was going cheap in a sale, it has that slightly crusty, wheezy warmth. I wound it up and looked for the level before distortion, and it was perfectly mic'able. The chavs in the flat downstairs protested and started playing rap cd.s very loudly. I buried the amp in cushions in

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