

Effectrode Tube Drive £269

Those glowing bottles aren't just for show - this is classic valve amp overdrive in a box! *by Adrian Clark*

Atantic-straddling stompbox maker Effectrode has compiled a small but very tasty range of hand-built, valve-powered stompboxes. Last year we looked at the Tube Vibe and Phaseomatic Deluxe, so it's now the turn of the Tube Drive - a chunky piece of engineering that promises everything from clean boost to fuzz meltdown.

Like the other pedals in the range, the Tube Drive is quite large and seemingly bombproof. The casing is metal on all six sides and the three protruding valve tips are protected by two thick guardrails. Three controls cover volume, drive and tone and the tone-stack is active, meaning you can boost high frequencies where most overdrive pedals only allow you to cut. Round the back, a small toggle switch adds an active low frequency boost, designed to give a similar effect to the extra oomph of a closed-back speaker cabinet.

While a number of overdrive pedals use valves at very low voltages to produce a simulation of amp overdrive, the Tube Drive does the real

thing. With no solid-state components, this stompbox features Class A circuitry running at real amp voltages.

Why do the valves protrude through the upper panel? Well, they get less hot, for a start, but there's also ease of access, because you can fine-tune the Tube Drive to create your ideal overdrive tones by using different valves (as long as they're of the nine-pin double triode type). The pedal comes fitted with two 12AX7s and a 12AT7, but you could use 12AU7 or 12AT7 for greater clean headroom, or a Phillips 5751 for smooth overdrive, for example.

Sounds

Powering it up, it's immediately apparent that the valves in the Tube Drive really are doing the work, rather than being an aesthetic nod to retro values. Starting off with a pretty clean dry amp tone, we instantly found a good range of crunchy rhythm tones with the drive control around nine o'clock. This setting would also be good for fatter clean lead playing where tone setting will make all the difference.

Pushing the drive up to 12 o'clock takes us into more of a classic rock field, especially when using Gibson-style humbuckers. Above this point, the overdrive becomes progressively more saturated and harmonically alive, although the definition of individual notes doesn't suffer as much as on other traditional-style overdrive pedals.

As mentioned, the tone control is active, and this really makes a difference. At high settings, the pedal never sounds brittle: the majority of the boost seems to be targeting the crucial high mid-range frequencies that give the electric guitar bite and presence. To balance high tone settings, you have the option of adding the active low boost switch, but tread carefully as

this packs a serious punch. For a huge solo sound, you just need these two tone boosts and a generous dash of drive.

Lower tone settings are good for trimming brittleness inherent in your guitar or amp tone - its particularly useful for getting a fatter lead sound from a Strat or Telecaster's bridge pickup, for example.

Verdict

This is another very impressive pedal from Effectrode. You could argue that most classic stompbox varieties have been reinvented a few times too many already, but the Tube Drive shows that there's still scope for improvement. For the most part, this involves better components and boutique prices, so pedals such as this are never going to be casual purchases for those with constantly evolving pedalboards. However, the Tube Drive produces the sort of high quality, beautifully balanced tones that pro rigs are built on, so if it does the sort of boost/drive/distortion job you need, it would be money very well spent. **G**

The Bottom Line

We like: Build quality and design; sounds; active tone and low boost

We dislike: Nothing at all
Guitarist says: Another fine pedal from Effectrode, the Tube Drive is aptly named: a quality boost, drive and distortion in one box

Effectrode Tube Drive

PRICE: £269

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Valve overdrive pedal

FEATURES: Fully valve-powered

CONTROLS: Volume, tone, drive, active low boost switch

CONNECTIONS: Input, output

MIDI: No

POWER: DC adaptor (supplied)

OPTIONS: None

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Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

It's apparent that the valves really are doing the work, rather than being an aesthetic nod to retro values



The Rivals

These pedals don't have much direct competition, although there are plenty of valve overdrives out there. The **Vox Cooltron** range (£139-149) and the excellent **Tonebone Trimode** (£269) offer several variations on the overdrive/distortion theme, but they all work by 'starving' the valves at low voltages and involve additional solid-state components. For another level of valve overdrive delight altogether, the luxury **T-Rex Spin Doctor** (£579) is a four-channel programmable valve overdrive that comes complete with motorised knobs and a four-band EQ.