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GREAT GUITAR GEAR

A Guitar Gear Grab Bag

By Mike Metlay
and Darwin Grosse

Effects pedals are one of the more affordable vices a recording guitarist can enjoy. There are thousands of them out there from dozens of makers, ranging from huge companies known worldwide to one-man shops turning out designs no one has ever heard of. In your quest for a signature sound that makes your tracks stand out from the competition, a cool effects box in the right place can inspire you to play better, help you work faster, and give you something extra in the sound department, without breaking the bank. The phrase you might hear yourself saying is... "Why not?"

Well, why not? In this Grab Bag, we review a wide variety of pedals from makers large and small. Some happened into our offices as part of the regular review procedure of our Spanish-language sister publication, *Música Pro*, which does a lot more with guitar effects than we do on a month-to-month basis; others were selected for special inclusion for a variety of reasons. If we left someone out that you're curious about, let us know! And enjoy this cornucopia of weird, wild, and wonderful pedals in the meantime.

tracks to illustrate the sound of many of these pedals; look for them on our website, in Resource Library > Magazine Extras > Audio And Music.

And now... the gear!—MM

Radial Engineering ToneBone Dragster

\$60; www.tonebone.com

Let's start off with the smallest, least expensive, and potentially handiest effects box in our lineup: the Dragster from Radial Engineering's ToneBone lineup. Radial calls the Dragster a "pickup load corrector", and that pretty much sums up what it does: it lets you dial in an impedance match between your guitar and whatever gear you have it hooked up to, so if you're running your signal into something other than an amp, like a wireless transmitter, an effects processor, or a computer interface that wasn't optimized for guitar use, you can make your guitar respond as if it's plugged directly into your favorite amp. Radial has added a Drag control to many of its guitar products over the years, and the Dragster just takes that control and puts it in a tiny metal box that you can attach to your guitar strap with cable wraps.

Effects and handy tools for your guitar recording pleasure

Our listening tests were done with a Fender American Fat Strat with a bridge humbucker and neck and center single-coil pickups, a Schecter A-5X baritone with coil-tapped humbuckers in neck and bridge positions, and a Risa Mando-Solid solid-body mandolin with a piezo-electric bridge pickup. Darwin did most of the playing with the Strat, and his comments are called out as the "meat" of most reviews. I jumped in on the Schecter for some tests at lower ranges, and the Risa let me hear a piezo response on steel and nylon strings.

We tested all of these pedals in a conventional guitar-amp rig and in a DAW-recording setup. For the former, here's a big shout out to Todd Skaw of Todd's Guitars Etc in Longmont, CO (www.guitarsetc.net), for loaning us a beautiful Fender Deluxe Reverb 2 x 12 combo amp. For the latter, we played the Strat through a Line 6 POD 2.0 as a recording interface and captured audio files in BIAS Peak Pro XT 6. While waiting for this issue to go to print, I'll be sifting through the audio and picking out tasty

The Dragster is a passive device and simplicity itself to set up: you plug your guitar into one jack, and run a cable from the other jack to your wireless setup or effects chain. A thumbwheel for Drag Control lets you dial in "less" or "more" drag; just play and listen, and turn the wheel until your tone sounds and feels right.

We had a great time playing with the Dragster. The audio examples are from the cleanest possible setup: the Strat into the Dragster into the POD with all effects turned off, so you can hear the effect on the guitar's humbucker and single-coil pickups. Darwin says: "While you can hear the tonal changes clearly in our direct-input audio files, the Dragster has a dramatic effect when used with an amp. It tames down the noise of a Strat's single coil pickups but also smooths out the dynamic response; the "quack" is suppressed, and there is a much more even feel to playing, good for jazz. You can dial in the amount of "quack" vs. the tolerable level of noise. It's not advertised as a noise reducer, but it is an essential toy for a Strat player to at least mess around with. I think it's a great option in a home-studio rig, especially with a limited number of guitars."

The Dragster definitely wins the "why not?" award for this set of reviews; it's affordable, simple, and offers a surprising range of tweaks to your bare instrument's tone and playing response. It's simply too cool *not* to have lying around!

