

Bench Tests

Fresh Filters

MXR Auto Q and Electro-Harmonix Tube Zipper

By Joe Gore

The signal-processing pendulum has swung toward filtering in a big way. Guitarists can now choose

between a bewildering array of filters, auto-wahs, and envelope followers. Recent pedals from Electro-Harmonix and MXR bring yet

Snapshot

The Electro-Harmonix Tube Zipper (\$378) combines envelope following and tube distortion, and the MXR Auto Q (\$185) offers a combination of modulation and auto-wah. The Auto Q receives an Editors' Pick Award.



MXR Auto Q

Electro-Harmonix Tube Zipper

Brushed sheet-metal housing

Dual 12AX7s

External battery access

Band switch

Cast-metal housing

Envelope Up/Down and Tron/Trill switches

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more new tricks to the auto-wah arena. Each box has its own idea of what will inspire guitarists, and their sonic characters couldn't be more different.

Electro-Harmonix Tube Zipper

As proven by hordes of aggro-rock guitarists, filtering and distortion go together like assault and battery. The Tube Zipper (\$378) combines both effects for

one-stop audio carnage. The Zipper's distortion is the real tube deal—two 12AX7s protrude from the light aluminum housing, protected by a sturdy metal bonnet. The pedal requires an AC adapter for operation, but the included 12-volt adapter connects via an unconventional jack—a bumper should you need to replace a dead power supply on short notice.

The Zipper's six knobs and two switches promise lots of action. There are separate Gain and Drive controls, as well as a master vol-

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MXR, dist. by Dunlop Manufacturing, Box 846, Benicia, CA 94510; (707) 745-2722; jimdunlop.com.

ume (a great feature, given that resonant filter sweeps can cause huge volume changes). Furthermore, you can choose between upward sweeps (the "normal" auto-wah/envelope follower sound, in which the filter opens to its brightest sound, and then gets darker)

and downward ones (the less-common alternative, in which sounds immediately suck down into a dark mass, and then bloom brighter). Also onboard: a Tron/Trill switch that toggles between straight envelope following (where

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The Ratings Game	Tone	Workmanship	Vibe	Value
MXR Auto Q 	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★
Electro-Harmonix Tube Zipper	★★	★★★	★★★	★★



Round & Round

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system or recording console (there's no need to slap an SM57 on the front grille).

Round Sound

With the rotating effect off, the Sidewinder produces a warm, meaty tone. The single 12AX7 does an admirable job of delivering big, clean tones at low settings, and nice, overdriven textures when you turn up the gain knob to five or six. However, extreme settings on either the gain or volume controls bring out a harsh, splattery quality. I obtained the best results with the gain and volume controls set no higher than 7.

The Sidewinder also sports an Accutronics reverb with an accompanying tone control. The reverb sounds great, and the tone control makes it possible to change the character of the amp by making only the *reverberated* signal brighter or darker. It's a subtle, almost subliminal effect, but it's very cool.

Engage the rotating chute's slow speed, and the Sidewinder instantly comes to life with a lush, 3-D tone. Imagine plugging into a top-quality chorus pedal, and then running it to three or four amps—that's how dramatically this effect envelops you. At the slowest speed, the effect is kind of like organic phasing. Medium speeds bring out more of a chorused sound, and fast speeds excel at spot-on B-3 imitations and instant psychedelia—bubbling, gurgling textures ricochet around the room. The effect is intense, but it never sounds "gimmicky." Even the fastest speeds produce musical timbres. When you shut the rotor off, an auto-stop function plants the chute at the optimal point to disperse your tone out front.

Motion Detector

On a gig, I tested the Sidewinder two ways. First, as a stand-alone combo with a Tele and a Tube Screamer in the front end. In this configuration, the Sidewinder's rotary effect was undeniably hip, but the volume output felt slightly anemic—especially considering the amp's 100-watt rating. Fortunately, the built-in microphone and XLR output made it easy to beef up my tone

through the house sound system.

Then I ran the recording output of a Hughes & Kettner zenTera into the Sidewinder's input to send a variety of amp sounds—plus effects—to the Sidewinder and apply the rotary effect. Although the setup may seem needlessly complex, it proved to be very flexible. Even when the chute wasn't spinning, adding the Sidewinder to my backline spread out the sound nicely. But when the rotor was engaged, the Sidewinder acted like a parallel loop for the Leslie sound—my original tone was still there, but with a dreamy, swirling ambience. The result was so cool that I hardly ever shut the rotor completely off—I'd simply go with the slow speed if I wanted a more subtle effect. The Sidewinder sounded great on an outdoor gig, but its effect was even more amazing on a club date, where there were walls and a mirror for the sound to bounce off of. In addition, there was another guitarist on these gigs, and the Sidewinder made it easy to avoid stepping on his toes. I simply turned the rotor to the fast speed and comped with faux-organ stabs.

Spin Out

The Sidewinder is a good-sounding, lightweight amp that proves the old adage, "There's nothing like the real thing." As cool as many of the rotary-speaker simulators on the market are, they can't duplicate the Sidewinder's deliciously complex, swirling tone.

Using the Sidewinder as a stand-alone combo, however, will require a few adjustments to compensate for its lack of channel switching (you can plug an overdrive pedal into the amp's front end) and less-than-mighty output (you can boost the signal by routing the amp's internal mic to a P.A. system). But as a powered extension cab, the Sidewinder is totally cool, and it's not much more expensive than many high-quality *unpowered* cabs—and those don't even spin! g

Contact Info

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Smooth Operator

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bridge makes it easy to manipulate the tone and volume controls while playing.

The neck is equally comfy, with an ultra-flat fretboard (Godin says it actually tapers *inward* toward its center) and expertly installed, buttery-smooth frets. The feel is fast and light, and the wide cutaway makes it easy to maneuver in the top register. This stress-free feel makes the LG a superb choice for guitarists with small or weak hands, as well as

those contending with playing pain.

Zing Thing

The Godin LG is a bang-for-buck winner that offers remarkable components, tones, and workmanship for its price range. Its sounds emphasize delicacy and detail over blood and thunder, but it would make a great foil to a more carnivorous ax in a two-guitar context. The LG also merits special praise for its silky playability. This guitar is, to plagiarize a memorable British beer commercial, "Smother than an ocelot cheating at baccarat." g