



GERMANIUM MANIA

DOES GERMAN ENGINEERING GOES HAND IN HAND WITH GREAT TONE? **PAUL SALTER** STOMPS ON A TRIO OF NEW PEDALS WITH A VINTAGE VIBE TO GET SOME ANSWERS

Once you step outside the sphere of ordinary effects pedals and into the rarefied world of boutique stompers, these simple boxes of wires and components seem to acquire a certain mystique. Besides the hand-selected diodes and quirky aesthetics there's just a greater mojo factor involved when you suspect that your pedal has been constructed by a fellow tone-lover who spends half of his life soldering iron in hand, up to his armpits in NOS valves and exotic capacitors that were only made

for a short period in 1942. It's just got to sound better than something that's dropped off the end of an automated production line, or the world isn't working how it should, right?

Telenordia are a small company from Germany who try to incorporate as much of this attitude into their products as possible. They base most of their pedals around simple but effectively designed circuits which have germanium transistors at their heart. With a hand-made, high-end audio mentality that puts tone first,

these stompboxes certainly present a lot of promise beneath their no-nonsense exterior. But is it a promise that their performance can live up to?

CONSTRUCTION & FEATURES

The guys at Telenordia have chosen to go the same way as many of the smaller-scale boutique pedal makers, and employ bog-standard, good-old cast metal cases for their stompboxes. These are the kind of hobby box cases that can be purchased from any of the electronics parts suppliers, and are

GBINFO

Telenordia

TELENORDIA EFFECTS

BUILT IN: Germany

POWER: 9V battery or 9V DC adaptor (not supplied)

DIMENSIONS: 52(h) x 102(w) x 121(d) mm

TA-24 TREBLE BOOSTER

PRICE: £169

TYPE: Booster stompbox

FEATURES: Gain, tone & treble controls

TK-23 KOMPRESSOR

PRICE: £179

TYPE: Compressor stompbox

FEATURES: Threshold, dry level & output controls

TA-100 OVERDRIVE

PRICE: £149

TYPE: Overdrive stompbox

FEATURES: Drive, output & tone controls

CONTACT:

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GERMAN GERMANIUMS

CLASSIC FUZZ TONE IS JUST THE START

■ The reason that germanium transistors are so effective in overdrive pedals is that they offer a different kind of gain characteristic to more modern silicon and IC-based circuits.

The way in which they clip is less predictable and somewhat softer and rounder in sound. Though unstable and inconsistent, select the best

individual transistor and get the circuit right, and you'll be rewarded with a warm effect that has a greater dynamic range and a more musical attack. Germanium transistors were widely used in most of the classic fuzz pedals, and because of this they're highly fashionable and sought-after among today's boutique freaks.

often used when the manufacturer's resources won't run to having the chassis specially made. While that might seem like a negative, it really doesn't prove to be a problem for most manufacturers, particularly when they're as stylishly finished as these are. Besides the savings in the setup costs of the pedal-builder that should result in a comparatively lower final retail price, many manufacturers love these boxes because they can be easily

"THE TA-24 OFFERS YOUR TONE SEVERAL DIFFERENT VARIETIES OF BOOST"

adapted to suit their designs and produce very durable pedals. You could literally drive a car over one of these units and only have to worry about the knobs and footswitch. Of course we're not going to put that to the test, but even the control knobs – often a weak spot – look sturdy enough to put up with all the usual on-stage use and abuse for years to come. A carefully applied paintjob can be very effective on such pedals, but

the decision to leave these in an 'unfinished' state, works extremely well, as does the funky engraved logo on the front.

All of these pedals are laid out the same.

Ergonomically speaking, the placement of the input and output sockets toward the front of the pedals seems a little illogical, as this means that your



■ Love that logo: Telenordia ramps up the retro appeal

jack plugs are vulnerable to a misplaced boot. Similarly, having the footswitch so far toward the front means there is a chance of tipping the whole thing over when you tread on it. Also, the mini jewel-type indicator light is right next to the footswitch and so isn't visible while you're actually switching the effect in or out. That might be awkward if you're relying on a visual indication, but at least the switching action is quite positive and definite and the jewel light is distinctive and visible at all other times.

A power supply input is positioned along the left side. Telenordia don't supply an adaptor with the pedals, but you can use anything with a Boss-style centre-negative barrel connector, rated between 9 and 18 volts DC. Getting hold of a suitable supply might be a good idea, as going the battery route reveals one down side of these boxes: the screwed-on bases. It's the only way to get to the batteries, and means that you'll need a screwdriver to hand whenever the need for a battery change arises. The drain doesn't seem too excessive with these particular models however, though you might want to ensure that you fit a fresh PP3 before a gig just to be on the safe side.

With the back plate removed, you can't help but notice just how tidy the internal assembly is. The wiring and soldering is immaculate and follows all those electronic conventions that ensure that the signal path is as pure and uncorrupted as possible. The circuits themselves are made up of high-quality discrete components rather than ICs (Integrated Circuits). This allows for a feature that the company are quite hot on: the use of germanium transistors throughout all

of their designs. These have a technically less efficient and less consistent way of operating in a circuit, but are said to result in a more organic change to your guitar tone. It's why many vintage-style overdrive units are based around old-fashioned germanium clipping rather than the more precise waveform corruption of silicon transistors.

TA-24 TREBLE BOOSTER

Treble boosters usually find their niche as the element that turns a good-sounding overdriven valve amp into something very special indeed. Treble boosters first gained popularity in the late '60s, as bands got louder and guitarists needed a way to cut through the mix. The effect simultaneously adds bite and definition, stops the amp getting muddy at high volume and pushes it further into singing, sustaining distortion. Think of Brian May's distinctive and expressive tone, achieved (in part) by putting a treble booster in front of an AC30.

The TA-24 isn't a simple copy of the Dallas-Arbitrator Rangemaster, the archetypal treble booster on which many vintage-style pedals are based. This pedal attempts a more natural and flexible approach to boosting your tone, with a considerable 22dB of full-range gain and a five-position rotary switch that gives access to various different high-pass filter circuits, with progressively higher corner frequencies. In many ways this resembles the approach of some bits of high-end hi-fi equipment, where a filter circuit built from multiple discrete resistor and capacitor combinations allows a much purer modification of the original signal than when a single potentiometer is



■ Just set your threshold and levels, and off you go

used. In essence this means that the TA-24 can offer your tone several different varieties of clean-sounding boost that give a flattering lift without undue side-effects or background noise. The lower regions of the treble switch give a more natural tone, while progressively higher settings give a more focused treble boost effect. Of course, which setting works best will depend on the type of guitar and amp you're using, but for the vintage valve approach it's hard to go wrong with the subtle rhythm lifts or fluid solo boosts that

"THE TK-23 GIVES CLEAN TONES MORE PRESENCE IN THE MIX AND ADDS PUNCH TO REGGAE, FUNK OR COUNTRY STYLES"

are all on tap here. Going the more modern route, you can achieve a credible solo tone by adding some of the more treble settings to a slightly scooped rhythm sound. Indeed, the actual overdrive capabilities of the pedal at higher gain settings going into a clean amp are very impressive too.



TK-23 KOMPRESSOR

As with most compressors, there are plenty of ways to use the TK-23 to completely mess up your tone if you overdo it. But there's also a lot of scope here for subtly enhancing an already good amp sound, or even tweaking it into something far more attention-grabbing. This particular pedal is based around an optical circuit, just like many of the most

highly regarded studio compressors. This gives a fairly natural effect without some of the negative extremes that can be achieved with run of the mill compressor stompboxes. The main control on this pedal is the threshold knob, which ranges from no effect at all to a strong attenuation that gives an artificial-sounding sustain. Used more intelligently, you can give clean tones a boost that increases their presence in a mix, and add punch that pays dividends with styles like reggae, funk and chicken-pickin' country.

Position the TK-23 before an overdrive source and a careful balance of the threshold and output controls yields an effective sustain-enhancing effect. It's all good stuff if you're looking to goose an overdriven sound that preserves the natural tone and dynamics of your guitar into something much stronger with a thicker body and decay. The pedal features a dry feed control, which basically mixes in the dry, uncompressed signal with the processed tone. This is subtle in use, but works well as an alternative to an attack control and can help make the guitar sound more natural.

DETAILS

INTRIGUING AND ORIGINAL, WITH SOME HIGH-QUALITY SOUNDS TO OFFER



■ Unusually, the jack sockets are positioned towards the front of the pedal



■ The indicator lights are bright but you can't see them when your foot's down



■ These pedals turn simplicity into an aesthetic virtue – call it workshop chic



"THE SOUND IS IMPRESSIVELY VALVE-LIKE IN ITS DYNAMIC RESPONSE AND BREAK-UP"

GBOPINION

TELENORDIA EFFECTS

GOLD STARS

- ★ High-quality, transparent effects
- ★ Low background noise
- ★ Lots of character

BLACK MARKS

- Accessing the battery is a fiddle
- You can't see the indicator light when your foot's on the switch

IDEAL FOR...

Discerning tone seekers with a boutique bent

TA-100 OVERDRIVE

The TA-100 belongs firmly in the 'subtle' category of distortion pedals. High gain isn't even an option here, even at the far end of the gain control's travel: "less is more" is the motto here. At lower levels of drive, the sound is impressively valve-like in its dynamic response and in the manner that it breaks up. Given a willing amp, this overdrive can be surprisingly natural in feel and barely colours the guitar's tone. There's none of the unpleasant boxiness that some pedals leave as an unfortunate aftertaste. Dig in lightly and the pedal will let much of your tone pass without too much clipping. Hit the strings a little harder and you'll be rewarded with a raunchy drive that'll take you right back to classic '70s-style

rock with a satisfying authenticity.

Crank the gain even more, however, and you might not be so satisfied. There's not enough range from the tone control to achieve scooped-style tones that'll work for modern metal. In fact, the complete cycle of the control doesn't change the sound much, even at the start and finish of the tone pot's travel. But the whole point is that the guitar's natural tone rings through the effect, just how you'd expect a good valve amp to treat your guitar. The downside is that lower notes do distort unnaturally. It's just too loose, and emphasizes some odd harmonics. Bear this in mind and don't go too mad with the gain control however, and the TA-100 feels and sounds very expressive, and rather addictive too.

GBRATINGS

TELENORDIA EFFECTS

BUILD QUALITY	★★★★☆
FEATURES	★★★★☆
SOUNDS	★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★☆
GBVERDICT	★★★★☆

GBCONCLUSION

BOUTIQUE BUILD QUALITY AND REWARDING SOUNDS

■ These Telenordia stompboxes are rightly billed as high-quality effect pedals. All three specimens have that something extra that lifts them above the average in both their performance and build quality.

It might seem that the ubiquitous hobby-box style chassis would be a sticking point for some buyers, but even this gives the pedals a handmade air that's quite appealing, despite the battery access problems. All three stompboxes fulfil their tasks as only a good-quality pedal can. The TA-24's adjustable boost frequencies are a great feature, the TK-23 provides some refined compression and the TA-100, while not for everyone, is an exceptionally transparent and tone-sensitive overdrive. With pedals like these around, there'll always be space for characterful stompboxes alongside the multi-effects units. **GB**