

# Visual Sound GarageTone Pedals

TESTED BY MICHAEL ROSS

### THE ECONOMIC APOCALYPSE HAS HAD

one positive effect in that gear companies are expanding their lines with lots of easier-on-the-pocketbook offerings. Visual Sound's great sounding pedals were already reasonably priced, but now they've gone one step farther with the new GarageTone series stompboxes, which are budget priced, but not budget sounding.

You could own all five GarageTone boxes for less than the price of some individual boutique pedals, yet these units feature solid 18-gauge steel enclosures and have the same handwired jacks as Visual's standard-line V2 pedals. Redundant connections on the vintage-style footswitches add reliability, as does the power-protection circuitry, which prevents damage to these pedals if you plug in the wrong type of power supply.

I tested the five GarageTone units with a 1965 Fender Strat and a Fernandes Tele-style (both equipped with DiMarzio Virtual Vintage pickups). For amplification I used Orange Tiny Terror and Egnater Rebel 30 heads, both of which were driving a custom-built 1x12 cab with an Eminence Texas Heat speaker.



### OIL CAN PHASER

Equipped with Speed and Depth knobs, the Oil Can (\$59 street) is a classic sounding phaser that provides all the viscous analog goodness you could want. This pedal excelled whether used to summon overdriven Van Halen whoosh or clean, Stuff-style funk, and I found the rate range to be perfect for dialing in anything from slow subtle sweep to fast Leslie froth. The Oil Can doesn't offer any bells or whistles, but its rich phasing mojo doesn't get much better at any price. For all it does and at such a great price, the Oil Can Phaser earns an Editors' Pick Award.

**KUDOS** Gorgeous analog phasing.

**CONCERNS** None.

**CONTACT** (931) 487-9001; [visualsound.net](http://visualsound.net)

### DRIVETRAIN OVERDRIVE

Visual Sound's Bob Weil, who co-designed the original Reverend Drivetrain (now discontinued), has updated it and repackaged it in a smaller enclosure. As with the original Reverend pedal—which was my go-to overdrive for years—the new Drivetrain (\$59 street) sounds like a less compressed Tube Screamer, though the 2-band EQ sure makes it easier to get the right balance of low-end thump and top-end presence. The dynamic response and wide overdrive range of the original Drivetrain is very much in attendance here. From clean, relatively transparent boost to singing sustain and smooth rock crunch, the new Drivetrain covers it all while sounding warm and natural.

**KUDOS** Warm, dynamic, tube-like drive. Versatile.

**CONCERNS** None.

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### MORE ONLINE

Check out these GarageTone video demos.



Get these links and more at [www.guitarplayer.com/june2010](http://www.guitarplayer.com/june2010)



### CHOPPER TREMOLO

The Chopper (\$69 street) features an opto-isolator and analog circuitry, and it has Speed and Depth knobs along with a clever Wave control that lets you dial in Fender-, Vox-, or Ampeg-style tremolo effects—each of which has its own unique character of volume modulation. The Chopper doesn't venture into full slicer territory on any Wave setting, although it can get angular and fast enough for Oz Noy-style stutter effects. Bottom line: If you're looking for a pedal that specializes in vintage-style tremolo effects, the Chopper is an ideal candidate.

**KUDOS.** Warm sounding. LED blinks in time with the tremolo speed.

**CONCERNS** Not as choppy sounding as its name would imply.

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### CHAINSAW DISTORTION

More of an aggressively toned overdrive than a distortion pedal, the Chainsaw (\$49 street) provided enough level boost to get my Orange Tiny Terror head to break up, but did not generate gobs of gain on its own. That said, it serves up some terrific Stonesy rhythm sounds, and has a cool upper-mid musical nastiness that really helps you cut through a mix. At full drive it only delivered about as much breakup as a cranked vintage Marshall or non-Top Boost Vox AC-30—meaning it's fully sufficient for Keith Richards/Chuck Berry stabs and double-stop riffing, but a little short on sustain. For soaring single-note soloing, I ran the Drietrain on clean boost into the Chainsaw, to which it responded much like a real amp while delivering its own brand of Brit-flavored lead wail.

**KUDOS** Packs a distinctive rock-and-roll overdrive voice.

**CONCERNS** Could use more gain.

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### AXLE GREASE DELAY

Featuring a hybrid digital/analog circuit, and equipped with Time (delay), Repeats, and Level controls, the Axle Grease (\$69 street) leans more toward the analog side of delay in the way its repeats break up in a pleasing, almost Echoplex-like fashion, while the original note remains clear and distinct. Only when performing some runaway feedback tricks did the Axle's digital factor become evident, and this was not so much in the sound, but in the way the pitch changed when I varied the Time knob. You may or may not dig the more extreme effects this pedal is capable of, but as a basic delay for faux-reverb or rockabilly-style slapback effects, the Axle Grease lays on the lube in a very cool way.

**KUDOS** Authentic analog/tape-type delay sound.

**CONCERNS** Feedback tricksters might need pure analog.

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