



STEP FAMILY

Modtone Speedbox Distortion XL, Dyno Drive, Atomic Phaser, Vintage Analog Delay and Aqua Chorus pedals

BY ERIC KIRKLAND

MODTONE PEDALS are the result of a joint venture between an American OEM manufacturer and a Chinese factory. Designed to take up less room on a pedal board (each is about the size of a typical MXR pedal), they almost magically affect the sweetest areas of a guitar's midrange.

Although Modtones are also among the least expensive pedals available today, their construction quality is outstanding, and in some cases their performance characteristics eclipse even the priciest effect pedals. In their short production life, they have already garnered international acclaim and are finding their way into the hands of today's most discriminating artists. All the pedals can be powered with a standard nine-volt battery or Boss-type adaptor.

SPEEDBOX DISTORTION XL

THIS IS A TRUE DISTORTION PEDAL consisting of a high-gain preamp built within a pedal housing. The Speedbox is intended for use in front of a clean amp so that all of the distortion and final EQ comes from the pedal. There are controls for tone, level and gain, and the bypass is split. The gain level is consistent, so as you dial up the knob the distorted signal just becomes louder. I found that the level knob was best used to achieve unity gain with my clean amp's volume level, to avoid any signal dropout when the pedal is switched on. The character of the Speedbox's distortion is gritty and aggressive in the upper mids, with rumbling and loose bass tones, much like a Nineties-era Marshall amp.

High-intensity LEDs make it easy to see which effects are on from across the stage.

All pedals feature high-quality jacks, pots and switches for long hassle-free operation.



DYNO DRIVE

THE DYNO DRIVE IS A CLASSIC overdrive pedal, built to focus a lot of its energy in the midrange and work equally well to provide some hair in front of a clean amp or push an amp's existing distortion into the stratosphere. A familiar three-knob setup includes controls for tone, level and drive. The brilliant upper-mid overtones are very pronounced and focused in a way that allows the pedal's tone to mix well with a large number of amps. It's very punchy and never overly saturated or fat. On its own with a clean amp, the Dyno can either push the amp's first gain stage to break up naturally or add its own stinging gain. Like the Speedbox, the Dyno has a split bypass.

ATOMIC PHASER

THE ATOMIC IS A MONSTER. While it has the classic filtered swoosh effect, it creates it with a pronounced wah effect that is intoxicating. Effect rate can be adjusted from 100ms to 6.5s, and the



MODTONE EFFECT PEDALS

LIST PRICES: Speedbox Distortion XL, \$49.95; Dyno Drive and Aqua Chorus, \$99.95; Atomic Phaser and Vintage Analog Delay, \$119.95

MANUFACTURER: SHS International, Modtone-effects.com

FEATURES AND CONTROLS: Speedbox Distortion: tone, level, gain (x2); Dyno Drive: tone, level, drive; Atomic Phaser: rate, depth; Aqua Chorus: rate, depth; Vintage Analog Delay: time, repeat, mix.

CONNECTIONS: Guitar In (mono), Guitar Out (mono)

CIRCUITRY: Analog **BYPASS:** Speedbox Distortion and Dyno Drive: Split; Atomic Phase, Aqua Chorus and Vintage Analog Delay: Buffered **POWER:** Nine volts via battery or Boss-style adaptor



depth range is well tuned to maintain the effect's impact. Regardless of the amp's gain levels, the Atomic Phaser has a strong and articulate voice that can also be warm and soothing. I was even able to produce a perfect English siren effect with bends and high tapping. The bypass is buffered.

VINTAGE ANALOG DELAY

GUITARISTS TYPICALLY PREFER the natural decay and warmth of analog echo and the clarity of digital delay. Modtone has achieved about the best balance of the two with its Vintage Analog Delay. The pedal combines an analog delay chip with very smart design choices. Delay times range from 130ms to 350ms, allowing rich-sounding slap-back delay, long repeating echoes and precise single repeats. The Vintage Analog Delay tracks at every speed without any level drop or modulation. It has controls for time, mix and repeat and a buffered bypass.

AQUA CHORUS

THE AQUA CHORUS distinguishes itself from other chorus pedals in ways that make it more useable in a variety of rigs and settings. Where many chorus pedals have tone that sounds muddled and overly lush, the Aqua Chorus is neatly defined. It treats single notes and chords with the same girth of tone, it's very responsive to touch, and there is no midrange dropout in the detuned waveform. I really marveled at the way this pedal keeps the bass intact and never reduced the signal level. It definitely comes closer to an authentic Leslie rotary-speaker tone than most of the exalted vintage chorus pedals. It has controls for rate and depth and a buffered bypass.

THE BOTTOM LINE

MODTONE HAS REDEFINED what guitarists can expect in inexpensive effect pedals while it has established a new plateau in effect performance. The Dyno Drive and Speedbox Distortion are very capable pedals in their respective arenas, but the Aqua Chorus, Vintage Analog Delay and Atomic Phaser produce tones and levels of definition that compete or hands-down whip the high-dollar competition. ✨

PRO	CON
FLAWLESS BUILD QUALITY; JAW-DROPPING TIME AND MODULATION EFFECTS; LOW COST	DISTORTION AND OVERDRIVE CAN DROP LEVELS BELOW UNITY VOLUME

