



EGO BOOST

A SPANISH TREBLE BOOSTER WITH PLENTY TO TWEAK AND A SIGNATURE TONE. **PETE CRISP** DIPS HIS SWITCH.

The treble booster is an unusual effect, quite different to your standard overdrive or distortion pedal, and to understand this particular breed you have to look at the reason why the treble booster was first invented.

In the 1960s, before the days of amps with master volume controls, guitarists were far more limited than they are now in their options when it came to amp levels and overdrive. The booster pedal did just what it said on the tin, pumping a higher-level signal into the front of the amp and giving rise to punchier tones and rich overdrive that couldn't otherwise be achieved without running the amp flat out.

So far so good, but guitarists also needed some way to counter the slightly dark and muddy tone of the amps of the day. The answer was the treble booster, which offered an increase in level but with an emphasis on the higher frequencies, restoring brightness and cut and creating even more drive and sustain. Vox was an early pioneer, adding the Top Boost to the AC30, and pedal wizards like Roger Mayer developed units for the likes of Jimi Hendrix. Another pedal, the Dallas Rangemaster, became legendary for its boosting capabilities and formed part of the classic tones of many players.

So what of the treble boosters reviewed here? Well, when a company sends you a piece of kit and asks for

your opinion, you might be flattered. When they then add your suggestions into the design and launch it as your very own signature pedal, well that's just dandy we reckon. That's essentially how the ThunderTomate Phil Hilborne Fat TB came to be, the small Spanish manufacturer deciding to produce a customised version of their V2 Treble Booster that would meet the demands of Phil Hilborne, one of the UK's hardest working guitarists and the subject of this month's Tone Zone on page 130. Phil should know what makes a good treble booster too – one of his many jobs is as one of the guitarists for the Queen musical *We Will Rock You*, where he has to recreate the creamy, treble-boosted tones of Brian May. →

GBINFO

THUNDERTOMATE TREBLE BOOSTERS

BUILT IN: Spain
TYPE: Treble booster stomptboxes

V2 TREBLE BOOSTER

PRICE: £112

FEATURES: Level control, internal 8-way DIP switch

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

DIMENSIONS: 60(w) x 55(h) x 110(d) mm

CONTACT:

ThunderTomate
WEB: www.thundertomate.com

PHIL HILBORNE FAT TB

PRICE: £135

FEATURES: Level & cut controls, internal 8-way DIP switch

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

DIMENSIONS: 60(w) x 55(h) x 110(d) mm

CONTACT:

Phil Hilborne
WEB: www.philhilborne.com

SILICON IMPLANTS

WHAT MAKES THESE TREBLE BOOSTERS TICK?

Both the ThunderTomate V2 and Phil Hilborne Fat TB pedals use silicon transistors.

Silicon took over as the semi-conducting material of choice in most audio equipment during the 1970s, replacing the older and less reliable germanium transistors. This has caused much discussion over the years as to which material gives the best results, germanium often being seen as giving something of a warmer tone. Some pedals still use the older type, so try both if you can to see which suits your

sound. Of course, regardless of what type of components are used, the most important thing is that the pedal is properly designed and built, which is certainly the case with these Spanish-made stompboxes.



The Fat TB is so good, Phil Hilborne has put his signature on it

"THE FAT TB ENRICHES THE TONE AND PICKS OUT THOSE FREQUENCIES THAT MAKE YOU TINGLE"

basically a variable low-pass filter allowing you to roll off the high end – was another of Phil's suggestions and is apparently based on the Vox AC30's cut circuit.

These are fantastic pedals in terms of construction, with a durable finish and very tidy internal wiring. The switching is true-bypass and single-point grounding is used for lower noise. However, we do have the same old gripe about having to undo four screws and take the backplate off to access the battery. It's also inside that we find the feature that really sets these pedals apart from the rest – an eight-way DIP switch, which allows you to shape the sound of the boost.

The DIP switches in the two pedals perform slightly different roles. On the V2, the octet is split in half, with four switches shaping the treble boost and the remaining four progressively adding 'body' to the sound. Each of the treble switches engages a high cut filter, so as you turn up the level pot you end up boosting a narrower frequency region, while the four body switches drop the lower limit of the boost from 15kHz down to 4kHz. On the signature pedals, three switches shape the top-end while the remaining

five progressively fatten the tone by boosting more of the mid-range.

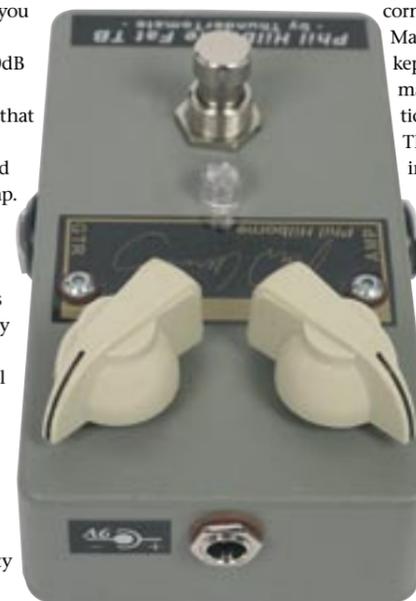
Helpfully, both pedals include a set of suggested settings stuck to the inside of the baseplate. The switches on both pedals are quite fiddly to move but after a bit of experimentation to find the sound that suits you, you'll probably be happy to screw the baseplate back on and leave them alone.

We hooked the Fat TB up to an EQ display to see what it's doing, and there's a noticeable increase in the signal around and above 2kHz. This sits well with ThunderTomate's own specs, the three treble switches actually being centred above 2.5kHz.



Both pedals have an eight-way internal DIP switch, to tweak the treble boost to perfection

When we tell you that the pedal offers up to 30dB of gain, you should realise that there's some serious top-end boosting on tap. At the other end, the 'fat' switches engage a series of progressively lower low cut filters. With all five set to the 'on' position, the low cut frequency is right down to 300Hz, thus boosting plenty of the mid-range and fattening the tone. Meanwhile, the cut control shaves off the highs down to around 2kHz.



corner. With the Marshall's preamp kept low and the master volume tickling 10, the Fat TB is like kicking in a turbocharger. This is a pedal that not only pushes a power amp like a bulldozer shovelling dirt but it also adds serious articulation to your tone. Starting with the third treble-boost DIP switch engaged and the level pot just past the

half-way mark, the Fat TB seems to enhance the harmonics, enriching the guitar's tone and picking out those frequencies that make bits of you tingle magically.

The three treble boost settings on the DIP switch each have enough variation to make them worthwhile. Which one you plump for will depend on the guitar and amp combination you use, and this is where the variety on offer comes in handy, allowing you to tailor the pedal to suit your setup. If things get too shrill the cut knob is great at pulling the Fat TB back into line to let the beefiness of the tone come through, but for real thickness the fat switches are the way to go. Flicking each one on progressively boosts the mids and bass to the point where the amp really thunders. The effect of

SOUNDS

Our first inclination with the Phil Hilborne signature pedal was to strap on the office Les Paul with the Fat TB inline between us and the 100-watt Marshall JMP stack loitering in the



The no-nonsense construction protects the internals and looks the business

CONSTRUCTION & FEATURES

The V2 and Fat TB are similar in size to MXR's compact stompboxes, but because of some strange optical illusion they appear to be much smaller – perhaps it's those large chickenhead knobs. The handsome die-cast casing is big enough to sit a 9V battery across its breadth, with a high-quality Neutrik quarter-inch jack socket on either side and a pale blue LED in the centre. The chunky footswitch and obviously robust jack sockets and power supply input leave you with little doubt that you'll get some serious life out of these ThunderTomate pedals.

As the V2 was the starting point for the Phil Hilborne Fat TB, you'd expect the two to be broadly similar. From the outset, the most obvious difference between the two pedals is that the V2 has just a single knob controlling level, while the Fat TB has two knobs, marked 'level' and 'cut'. What's less obvious is that the V2's knob has indents in its travel (while the Fat TB's level knob is continuous), meaning a setting is less likely to get knocked out of position. We asked Phil why this is the case and he explained that he'd asked for the alteration, as with a stepped knob he'd always end up wanting the sound in-between two steps! The addition of a cut control –



GBOPINION

THUNDERTOMATE V2 TREBLE BOOSTER

GOLD STARS

- ★ Excellent tonality
- ★ Top-notch construction

BLACK MARKS

- Battery & DIP switch access is fiddly
- We miss the Fat TB's cut control...

IDEAL FOR...

Anyone looking for flexible boosting and sweet saturation

DETAILS

TWO HIGH-QUALITY, HIGHLY VERSATILE TREBLE BOOSTERS



■ The Fat TB's controls offer continuous travel, while the V2's is stepped



■ Both pedals come with a rough guide to the huge array of tone options



■ The pedals can run on a standard 9V DC mains adaptor or from a 9V battery



GBCONCLUSION

TOP TREBLE BOOSTING WITH EXTRA VERSATILITY

■ The big question of course has to be 'do I really need a treble booster?' Many guitarists have probably never even considered adding one of these stompboxes to their rig, but we reckon there are a load of benefits to be had from a pedal like the V2 or Phil Hilborne Fat TB.

You certainly can't knock the build quality and the sounds these pedals are capable of producing are at times exquisite. Compared to other pedals in this genre, the Fat TB is perhaps brighter than some, but then its unusual cut control means you easily tailor the top end to taste. The DIP switches allow even more control. If you're in the market for a treble booster, either pedal would be an excellent choice, but for the little extra it cost we'd definitely opt for the signature model, which is a massively versatile and great sounding pedal. **GB**

GBOPINION

THUNDERTOMATE PHIL HILBORNE FAT TB

GOLD STARS

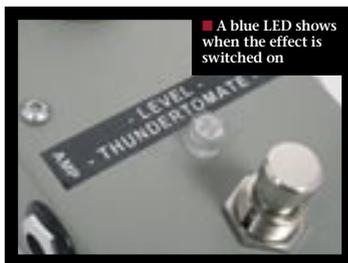
- ★ Excellent tonality
- ★ Very flexible
- ★ Top-notch construction

BLACK MARKS

- Battery & DIP switch access is fiddly

IDEAL FOR...

Guitarists needing to boost the parts other pedals can't reach



■ A blue LED shows when the effect is switched on

adding each switch is quite subtle, but what strikes you is not just that the tone fattens gradually but that the low-end retains a tight feel throughout.

What really impresses about the Fat TB is its ability to accommodate so many different styles of music. Mild crunch and jangly clean tones are just as easy to get as full on lead guitar tones, the pedal letting you control

your sound by adjusting the guitar's volume. Backing it off leaves the tone punchy with less drive but still plenty of highs, not a scenario you'd normally find without a pedal like the Fat TB in-line.

Comparing the V2 to the Phil Hilborne Fat TB, the base sound is very similar between the two pedals. This is quite surprising in a way, as the DIP switch operation, on paper at least, looks quite different, especially with regard to the lower frequencies. However, with all switches engaged, the Fat TB has more mid-range boost on offer and a little more gain as well. Apart from that, the cut control is the obvious omission, and while this limits your options somewhat, the V2 is still a cracking pedal to play through, especially for lead guitar.

GBRATINGS

THUNDERTOMATE PHIL HILBORNE FAT TB



GBRATINGS

THUNDERTOMATE V2

