

CARL MARTIN

BLUE RANGER

BY JOE CHARUPAKORN

Though Danish pedal, amplifier, and rack-effect builder Carl Martin enjoys a reputation as a sort of volume boutique builder, the company has built effects for the working musician for years. The recently released Vintage Series, which is built in China, are among his most accessible yet. And the Blue Ranger (which Martin himself allegedly decided to build after a good, long stare at the Stevie Ray Vaughan statue in Austin, Texas) is the latest addition to this line.

Hip and Handy

Housed in a distinct, royal blue case with cream-colored knobs and an '80s video-game-type font, the Blue Ranger would


make a handsome addition to just about any pedalboard. The control layout consists of knobs for Drive, Tone, and Level, and a true-bypass footswitch. The back of the pedal is covered with a carpet-like surface that's ready to be attached to the 'board with Velcro—a pretty convenient design feature. You do, however, have to remove the screws from the four corners of the pedal's rear to get to the battery. That's not as convenient, but most players these days use external AC power supplies.

Full Range Drive

I tested the Blue Ranger using an Ernie Ball Music Man Axis Sport through a Fender Super-Sonic head and 4x12 cabinet. Initially, I had a hard time dialing up a setting that sounded as full as I like. And by itself, the Blue Ranger's voice is less organic and amp-like than I prefer. With a live band, however, the Blue Ranger cut through the mix beautifully, and what sounded a little harsh in isolation really came to life in the group context.

With the Drive all the way off, the Blue Ranger added grit that did wonders for my thin-sounding single-coil pickup setting

Rating:




Buy If...
you want an aggressive Texas-inspired pedal that won't break the bank.

Skip If...
you're expecting a repackaged Tube Screamer.

Carl Martin
Street \$135
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and supplied heft without dirtying up the tone too much. Nudging the Drive up between 11 and 1 o'clock and switching to humbuckers gave chords an open and airy AC/DC-like crunch, much to my surprise. Goosing the Gain gave me a more compressed sound. And while turning up the Blue Ranger's Drive adds a lot more dirt, it also increases the volume noticeably, and when maxed, the pedal gets pretty unruly, bringing you very nearly into the realm of distortion. Compared to the granddaddy of Stevie Ray pedals—the Ibanez Tube Screamer—I found the Blue Ranger to be less transparent, more aggressive, and much louder than a Tube Screamer. This pedal definitely longs to be heard. The Blue Ranger also puts out a lot of highs. Even with the Tone knob all the way off it was as bright as my Tube Screamer is at about 2 o'clock.

The Verdict

Although ostensibly an overdrive pedal, the Blue Ranger's character is often more akin to a distortion pedal. It's nowhere near as reserved as Ibanez's famous green pedal and can roar like a beast if you need it to. But for having a more aggressive voice, it's a much more individual pedal. If you're looking for yet another Tube Screamer clone, the Blue Ranger might be too in-your-face. But if you are looking for an overdrive pedal that isn't quite as subdued, the Blue Ranger may be the trigger-happy Lone Ranger you're looking for, too.