

**Detailed Review of the
Celestial Effects
Taurus Blues Overdrive Pedal
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The world of guitar gear has become exciting and also difficult to navigate through since the boutique revolution. New amp companies, guitar builders, effects builders show up almost on a monthly basis and sifting through the seemingly endless sea of possibilities becomes a non-official disease whimsically called Gear Acquisition Syndrome (G.A.S.). As a utility player, meaning, I have to be able to conjure up tones for different styles of songs and from a wide tone palette, I bought into the pedal frenzy; the concept was simple: “get a great clean amp tone, then spice it up with pedals.” At one point in time I even considered going the effects rack route. As I have become more experienced, my patience with carrying gear, but also my ability to conjure up tones with a simpler signal path has improved (volume and tone knobs on guitars are really usable!

Who would’ve thought?!).

One interesting fact, is that from the dozens of pedals I have owned, and a great majority of these being boost/drive/distortion, I never owned what most would consider a “proper overdrive,” meaning a low to mid-gain pedal that is meant to push the front end of an amp. I recently revamped my live rig. Gone is the Marshall, which I miss, but without an attenuator (which killed dynamics), it was useless as it was too loud (according to sound engineers at clubs). Gone is the 4x12, heck even the 2x12 is gone. I dove head first into a childhood dream, which was to own an Orange amp, so I picked up the now discontinued Rocker 30. Then a wild hair struck me, and I went with a 1x15 speaker, and I chose the Eminence Big Ben. With the Orange, and its channel switching, I thought, “ah, no more drive pedals needed (at least for live work).” For the most part it is true, but I have become reliant on the tonal/gain enhancement of the Scorpio Super Boost, and it stays on 100% of the time. Also, for the occasional backline gig, the Virgo Rock Overdrive becomes my drive channel and it is extensively used for recording; the Aquarius Fuzz is my secret weapon. But then, under standard operating conditions, I found that I needed a bit more at times, especially for slide work.

The forum chatter was that no overdrive or boost pedal really worked with the R30, and I must partially agree as it is the most “drive pedal unfriendly” amp I have ever owned; always the rebel I tried all of the Celestial Effects pedals I owned with variable, and happy success. There was something missing however. Something that would make my tone... LARGE! To my rescue, comes the Taurus Blues Overdrive. I have had the pedal for a few weeks now and it took this long to find the right words to describe it. I also wanted to do a proper comparison, so not only my live rig was used, but also some different amps, guitars, and comparison with overdrive pedals in a similar category.

Guitars used were a 1976 LP Custom, a 1976 Electra Omega, a 90's Tokai Flying V, a 1974 Greco Firebird V, a 2002 Firebird VII, and a 1996 MIM Strat with Fender Lace Sensors and bridge upgrades. The amps used were the Orange Rocker 30 through my 1x15 cab, a Budda Twinmaster Plus combo, a 1965 Gibson Minute Man, and a JTM45/Bassman custom job through a 1x15 cab with an Eminence Commonwealth. For pedal comparisons I chose the venerable TS808 (original one), a Cochrane Tim, a silver Klon Centaur, and an Analogman KOT. I had to borrow these uber expensive pedals from some good friends, and pedals were returned safely!

Needless to say Celestial Effects always delivers in the workmanship, aesthetics, and packaging departments. The pedal looks gorgeous, is built like a tank, and backed by CE's warranty and return policy, which should make every gearslexic (people who are dyslexic about gear) tone chaser very happy! The layout includes the now familiar to me volume, tone, edge, and gain, with a three position selector switch which toggles between symmetrical silicon diode clipping to the left, asymmetrical MOSFET clipping to the right and no clipping circuits in the middle position. A super bright green LED lets you know your tone is about as good as it can get. The pedal can run at both 9 and 18 V, and I stayed with 18 V throughout.

I ran every possible combination of Guitar-Taurus-(other drive pedals)-Amp I could fathom. The starter was my live rig, which are the Firebird guitars into the Orange and 1x15. What I first noticed is the giant volume boost available on the middle selector position. The Rocker 30 is rather insensitive to boosts, but because the Taurus offers such brute force, there is actually a perfect amount of gain and volume boosts to cut through a solo. With all knobs at noon the volume sweep is fully functional across the entire range. There is also a nice amount of low mids that adds to the tonal flavor of the Taurus. This adds a great amount of girth to the notes, especially on the high strings, something fans of Scott Henderson would understand and appreciate. The other pedals tested either seemed too flat or too boosted across the mids, not to say those are bad things if you are looking for that, but just a difference. Note clarity is remarkable, picking dynamics is equal to if not better than the higher end pedals considering the added amount of headroom the 18 V power adds. The gain and tone controls work in conjunction with the edge control for super tone shaping capabilities. Working those three knobs, not only can give you extra boost, but alter the EQ curve and gain properties by dialing a fuzzy goodness around the notes. Although it may seemingly appear as if the pedal sounds too fuzzy when played by itself and this initial setup, in band situations, whether it is live or recorded it really sits perfect in the mix.

When I first received the pedal at home I plugged into my JTM45/Bassman clone and my 1965 Gibson, using the other guitars mentioned. I immediately fell in love with the pedal. These are fairly clean amps, unlike the Orange, and the Taurus is just so smooth. Maybe that is why it is called the "Blues Overdrive" but I would venture to say it should be called "all genre overdrive," since it does what all the other pedals do and then some. With these more input sensitive amps, using my strat, I found SRV tones, Robben Ford tones, Eric Johnson tones, and then some! The Taurus really responds superbly to

picking dynamics, volume control tweaking and pickup choice. With a weaker output pickup like the PAF styles PUP's in the LP guitars I tried it, with the pedal dimed, I could go from a Michael Bloomfield tone, passing through Paul Kossoff, and landing on early Billy Gibbons just by tweaking the guitar and letting the pedal in its different clipping stages bark back at me. The other pedals I used were fantastic also in this setting, with the Tim coming a close second, but the Taurus just topped the tone and versatility across the board. Of particular note is my JTM45/Bassman clone with a LP and the Flying V. I will venture to say that I was able to get very good approximations to certain famous late 60's era tones a la Beano record and Peter Green fueled Bluesbreakers tones. And then a surprise came when with the incessant knob twisting and string banging; there it was, Joe Bonamassa-esque tones courtesy of turning the volume knob down, middle position and blending pickups. I have also recently become a huge fan of David Grissom, and with some humbuckers in front of the Taurus, there are tones reminiscent of his "big bottom end" tone. Sure this is easily achieved some other ways, but personally I had a tough time recreating a simile of these tones using one pedal alone. I found the Klon to be a one trick pony, same as the vintage TS808. The Tim and KOT were superb pedals, with more versatility and gain than the other two. What I found is that the Taurus can cover all of those, not exactly replicating, but in a mix anyone would be hard pressed to tell. The Taurus has much gain as the KOT and is as versatile as the Tim.

Ok so the Taurus does an excellent job at capturing the vintage vibe; is there more in it? Absolutely! The edge and gain controls are so darn interactive with each other and that you can go from hi-fi to lo-fi depending on the guitar used, and settings on the pedal. Flying V (at least how mine is setup) into Taurus into the Budda Twinmaster made it sing. Tones reminiscent of modern day Gibbons, Buckcherry, Slash, Jimmy Herring, can all be found. This is easily achievable by taking advantage of the different and very musical clipping circuits. I owned a Fulldrive MOSFET, and the Taurus slays it. These other clipping stages have a bit more compression to them, but they still allow the notes to bloom very organically.

I have to make a confession at this point. I had not played a Strat in years and actually had to do some work to mine since it was just lying around, to get it up to playing condition. I am a huge Rory Gallagher fan, and the combination of the Strat and the Taurus made me forget all about the other pedals and jam along with Rory for hours and dozens of beer bottles!

It is easy to keep on writing, going on and on about the Taurus, and how it popped my overdrive cherry. But instead I am going to go play with it some more and let you find for yourself what has been missing on your pedal board.