

**Detailed Review of the
Celestial Effects
Virgo and Scorpio Pedals
By
Gio da Silva
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Do we really need another overdrive pedal? Do we really need another boost pedal? Well, if you are the type of guitar player who is searching for your sonic “soul-mate” then the answer will always be a resounding YES! That is, until you touch the Celestial Effects Virgo Rock Overdrive (VO) and Scorpio Super Boost (SSB) pedals. These zodiac-inspired effects pedals have accomplished something very few boutique companies have been able to do recently which is break away from the “just another tube screamer” mold.

Similar to my previous experience with the Aquarius fuzz, my Virgo and Scorpio arrived very nicely packed, with case candy (stickers, guitar pick), no pesky rubber feet attached (but they are included), and with beautiful artwork, colors and built to last a life time, and then some! Extra kudos is in order for the placement of the IN-OUT jacks on the front of the pedal as opposed to the sides. For wider cases like the Virgo, this makes for convenient wiring in the pedal board and also saves a bit of real estate. Did I mention that they were eye candy? Well they are!

For my sonic assessment of the pedals, I plugged a parts-caster Tele with DiMarzio Chopper T on the bridge and a vintage Seymour Duncan 59 on the neck, and a 1976 Electra Omega LP copy (set neck, mahogany body, maple top, maple fretboard) loaded with DiMarzio Virtual PAF's, into a 1984 JCM800 2204 50 Watt, out to a 2x12 semi open back cab with Hellatone 60 speakers. I first completely took my pedal board apart then connected the Aquarius, Virgo, and Scorpio in different orders straight into the amp, when I found the combination I most enjoyed, which so happened to be after two hours of really putting the pedals through their paces, and really going wiring crazy, I just decided “hell, I can't find a bad sound so I will stick with what I usually do,” and the final order was Aquarius into Virgo into Scorpio.

The Virgo is a very versatile overdrive pedal that is unlike the tube screamers of the world. It has 4 knobs (VOLUME, TONE, EDGE, GAIN), and a 3-position selector switch, which either adds or eliminates clipping stages. The Virgo can be operated from 9-18 Volts, and when I am given that choice, I go for broke and use 18V and never look back. I first started with all knobs at 12, which gave me a nice light overdrive. When testing pedals I always adjust the TONE knob first. If a pedal has a sluggish TONE control that barely makes any difference in the EQ curve, then forget it. The Virgo has an amazing range on that TONE knob, and it functions all the way from zero to max. I found that the sweet spots for me were between 10 and 2 O'clock, but that will be highly dependent on what guitar and amp combination, and how you dial the EQ in the amp itself. The VOLUME function and GAIN functions are self explanatory, but it suffices to say that the pedal has plenty of overall output and that the GAIN knob can take you from just a light drive all the way into a nice tight grind. Now, where the Virgo really gets interesting is when you start playing with the EDGE control and the clipping switch. The EDGE is very interactive with the GAIN control. With both maxed out and the clipping switch to the right, it was easy to get into Gary Moore tone territory with a LP type of guitar and did a pretty convincing “Too Fast For Love” by Motley Crue! The EDGE control to me seems to affect the amount of “hair” around the notes; when dialed off it is rather smooth, and with maxed out it is mean! With the clipping switch to the left, you will notice a volume drop courtesy of higher compression. This clipping stage was not my personal favorite for just listening to the amp live and my style of playing, BUT and this is a HUGE BUT, record some guitar tracks and you will see its usefulness. Nice analog compression and singing sustain, courtesy of intelligently designed analog circuitry with silicon diodes, instead of some digital plug in. The left position clipping stage was amazing for legato playing and those who enjoy tapping a la EVH. The right hand clipping position gave me a great rhythm crunch, thanks to the MOSFET and germanium clipping, which remained nice and tight on the bass department. Think “Custard Pie” on steroids. My favorite

setting, for purely live purposes, was the middle position with all clipping stages bypassed. Here the pedal just breathes and becomes an extension of the player. The Virgo showed incredible touch sensitivity and response to the controls on the guitar across all three clipping positions, but the middle and right positions are for the “Jeff Beck” in you, meaning that if you want to control everything from the guitar, and touch dynamics, then this is the pedal for you! One of my “litmus tests” for a good overdrive is to see how close I can get to Paul Kossoff’s tone. The Virgo absolutely nailed “Mr. Big” and “Fire and Water”. I am a happy man! Oh, being in Texas, I had to give it the ZZ Top treatment, and methinks that Billy G would approve of the harmonic content, tightness, sustain, and grind of the Virgo. Total OCD ass-kicker! The Virgo really provides the best note separation and touch sensitivity in a mid-heavy overdrive pedal I have ever heard and had the pleasure to play.

Next it came time to test the Scorpio. The Scorpio is a simple external layout boost, with only one knob. I like that! This pedal, unlike the Virgo, runs at 9 Volts only. I first started with the knob turned all the way to its minimal setting. Surprisingly, and this put a smile on my face already, there was a noticeable tone enhancement that happened even when the knob is on zero. Notes suddenly popped out better (great for country picking), and there was a clarity/hi-fi presence added to the overall tone. Sounded absolutely stunning for complex jazz chords! Now... here comes the fun! Cranking the Scorpio into higher settings was like going on a sonic journey of rock and roll. The pedal is also very touch-sensitive, and the more you dig, the more it barks... rather, stings! It is safe to say that the Scorpio is the best boost pedal I have ever played. As the gain is increased there is an audible slight compression (more like a sag actually where the notes compress then bloom) and fuzziness that comes up. The notes bloom very nicely at higher settings and the interaction with the touch on the strings and the guitar controls is just stunning. It is actually difficult to express how great and versatile the Scorpio really is. I think that in order to do it justice in terms of describing it properly I would have to go back in time and do a stint with James Joyce himself! Since that is sort of impossible, just get one and be speechless like I am. One knob made two hours go by like it was five minutes.

Now here comes the REAL fun part. As I mentioned earlier I hooked the Aquarius, Virgo, and Scorpio in all possible combinations and settled on the Aquarius into Virgo into Scorpio and here is why. I first tried the Scorpio placed before the Aquarius and Virgo in the signal chain. It added all kinds of sustain and a slight boost to the signal that would be perfect for guitar solos, if you were a one guitar band. I find that I like to have my boosts after my overdrives and such so that I can really dial in the amount of volume and cut through the mix. My biggest problem to date with boost pedals has been that either they are tube screamers which can boost and add gain with crappy tone, or they are too clean and that is not appealing to me personally, because in order to make them work, I had to hit the amp so hard that the ears of everyone in the room bleed. Having the Scorpio follow the Virgo in the signal chain allowed me not only to increase my overall volume for solos, but it added the right amount of gain structure around the notes and the sustain needed for my playing style. The Aquarius also worked great in conjunction with the Virgo and I found a new favorite gnarly lead sound that I am planning to use regularly.

This entire account is the condensation of 5.5 hours of playing, nearly non-stop. It really was a wonderful Friday night of tone discovery. All three pedals are individually amazing, and when hooked together, really create an arsenal of tones. In all the possible combinations I found Angus Young, Billy Gibbons, Paul Kossoff, Gary Moore, Jimmy Page, some EVH, Rory Gallagher, in other words, really classic tones. With other boutique builders or mainstream companies, you really have to search for the “sweet spot,” then tape the knobs down and hope to the almighty that from room to room that the tone would not change. The most amazing thing about all of these pedals however is that there was not a single bad sound to be found, and just because they can emulate certain tones, this is not their purpose and also not the design concept. What I found in all three pedals from Celestial that I own so far, is that they are not single-purpose tools, and act more like real studio-quality preamps should. In other words, they are versatile. The burden is now placed on the musician to get creative and no longer use the limitation of tools as an excuse. Celestial Effects has freed me from the worries of “how will I get my tone” and instead, allowed me to know that I will find the right tone for the right part, every time. This may just be the next step in changing the nature of how stomp boxes should be designed.