

Strymon Flint Pedal Review

Charles Saufley
September 05, 2012

It's been fun to watch Strymon confound analog dogmatists over the last few years. The company's Blue Sky reverb and El Capistan delay are elegant, strikingly accurate DSP takes on difficult-to-emulate analog effects. And only the most-curmudgeonly luddite would fail to be impressed by how alive and authentic Strymon's effects can sound.

With the introduction of the Flint, Strymon set its sights on the most ardent of analog purists. After all, the union of reverb and tremolo is the cherry on top of some very classic amps—and as a consequence, about the only effects a lot of analog devotees will touch. Not surprisingly, the Flint nails those vintage tones. But the Flint is not strictly an exercise in vintage simulation. It also enables delicious combinations of vintage colors and contemporary tones that invite creative exploration.

Spell It Out in Black and White

Like most Strymon pedals, the Flint is thoughtfully designed and packs a lot of functionality in a compact layout that's intuitive and not too cluttered. The two knobs, toggle switch, and footswitch on the left control the tremolo section, and the toggle moves between voices for a harmonic dual-band filtering tremolo (like on an old Fender 6G5 Pro Amp), a brownface-like tube-bias-style tremolo, and a photocell-style trem that evokes a blackface Fender. The three knobs, toggle switch, and footswitch to the right are dedicated to the reverb section, where the toggle switches between a '60s tank-style voice, a '70s solid-state plate-style reverb, and an '80s digital rack-like voice. The three knobs control mix, color (or tone), and decay rate.

If you want more power to tailor your sound, four of the controls have secondary functions including a +/- 3 dB boost/cut for each channels, tap-tempo divisions (from 1/16 to 1/4), and reverb/tremolo effect order.

Surfing Space, Shape Shifting

There's no way to do justice to the breadth of this pedal's capabilities in a review of this length. But one of the most fundamental—and satisfying—merits of the Flint is that you don't have to dig too deep to reap sonic rewards. The Flint—outside any considerations of analog authenticity—just plain sounds good. Set up any of the three tremolo settings at medium intensity and about a third of full speed, add a little reverb, and an otherwise no-frills amp like a Champ will be come a mesmerizing dream machine that makes an E minor chord sound like blissful slumber in Elysium.

The tremolo pulses are wonderfully organic whether they come at you with choppy intensity or in softer swells. The '61 harm setting has a warbly, underwater, vibrato-like quality that can get delightfully queasy at high-intensity. And no matter how surgically you listen, it's impossible to discern digital pollution or jarring right angles. It's all lovely, fractal, blooming stuff—tinged with hints of phase and pitch shifting that sounds great at intense settings. The '63 tube setting generates more regularly contoured swells that sound detailed at slow speeds. The '65 photo setting is the most dramatic tremolo flavor—gloriously choppy and dramatic, and perfect for everything from Johnny Marr's churning "How



Soon is Now” riff to the slow, narcotic pulse of the Viscounts’ “Harlem Nocturne” or Spacemen 3’s opiated instruments.

The reverbs are similarly intoxicating, nuanced takes on their inspirations. The ’60s setting reproduces the fractured, irregular echoes and clanging high-end saturation you get when mix, tone, and decay are set high and long—perfect for dripping wet surf tones. The ’70s setting lends an unmistakable shag-carpet studio ambiance at low levels. But at longer decay times, it works with slow and intense tremolo settings to generate airy and very convincing rotating speaker textures. The ’80s setting, meanwhile, is the ticket to Lanois and Eno’s atmospheric states.

The Verdict

There’s plenty of precedent for the reverb/tremolo tandem. But what Strymon does with the recombinant possibilities of these particular flavors is inspired. The Flint can move from gutter-tough noir moods, to sun-bleached surfscapes, to time-and-space-stretching ambience with a few simple tweaks. The ease with which you can access the full range of sounds and tone-shaping capabilities is a minor masterpiece of stompbox-interface engineering too. But above all, it’s the quality and authenticity of tones that impresses. Strymon’s work on this front will no doubt delight DSP believers and those that listen with open ears. But this pedal is bound the change the minds of more than a few analog purists, and that may be the ultimate testimonial to how good the Flint can be.

Ratings

Pros:

Authentic, organic tones. Well-designed interface. Exciting recombinant possibilities.

Cons:

No reverse reverb.

Tones:

5 / 5

Ease of Use:

4 / 5

Build:

5 / 5

Value:

4.5 / 5

