

## Effects Pedals and Racks

Many people ask me the question what type of pedals, multi-effect, or rack mount effects units should I buy? First of all we should look at what the professionals use and then you can make up your mind, as this will give you a good place to begin. I will assume that you want to use them for jamming or live performing. If you want to use them for recording it will be slightly different.

### What do the Pros use?

Many of the world's top professionals hardly use any effects at all. For example B.B. King just plugs straight into the amp, the great jazz guitarist Bruce Forman does the same. John Scofield the fusion player mainly uses a little overdrive and chorus. Eric Clapton hardly ever uses effects, although he did in his "Cream" days. You will find that most top players realise that the sound they produce is all in their hands and their brain, and don't use many effects at all.

However a lot of top players (especially the rock players) tend to use some form of overdrive, delay, chorus, wah-wah, and reverb, but don't have them working all at the same time. These five effects are the most used that you will hear on any modern recordings.

**Overdrive** gives a distorted type sound and many rock players use this sound for rhythm and lead playing. They tend to use a little for rhythms and a bit more for leads, i.e. overdrive on 3 for chords and on 6 for solos. A lot of players from other styles use a clean (without effects) rhythm guitar sound. Be very careful though, as it is a common fault for beginners to use too much overdrive.

**Delay** repeats back exactly what you have just played. You will hear this effect on many solos and rhythms dating right back to the 1950s. There are many different ways you can go about using delay devices, so keep your ears open.

**Chorus** this effect is mainly heard on rhythm guitar parts and has a mild wavering sort of effect.

**Wah-wah** can be heard on many recordings from the 1960s onwards. It is the quick crossing over between treble and bass which creates this effect.

**Reverb** is used a lot in live performance as well. It sounds like you are playing in a larger room when it is on. This is great for when you are playing in a dead room (one that doesn't echo). If you are playing in a live room (one that does echo), don't use too much. It can also make you sound like you are miles away from the band. Some amplifiers already have a spring reverb effect built into them, so you might already have one.

There are many other effects that you can buy like octave dividers, harmonizers, phasers, compressors, envelope filters, and many more are being invented right now, but just keep in mind that the five most often used are the ones above. They are the ones you should buy and learn to use first.

## **What should I use?**

So what is best to buy pedals or rack mounts or multi-effect units which sit on the floor? Well it is hard to determine as some people prefer pedals, some prefer the rack mounts, and others prefer the multi-effect units. I suggest that you know these rules before deciding. The single units perform the best so most top players tend to use either pedals or single effect rack units (that is one effect in each rack). The pedals are the least most expensive to buy. The multi-effect units don't work as good because the different effects share the same circuitry where there are normally upward of twenty effects in a box. However they are relatively inexpensive for what you get, but you might not need all the effects that are in the unit.

## **Being Careful with Effects**

Effects are definitely great toys to play with, but remember that they can ruin a great guitar part very easily if used wrong. Some wrong ways are to use the same sound in every song, or too much distortion resulting in not being able to hear the notes all that well, etc. If a bad guitar part is played with overdrive on, it just sounds like overdriven bad guitar, so don't use effects to hide any inadequacies.

Don't confuse the studio players with yourself. If you are a reader of one of the monthly guitar magazines you will read that the studio players have racks and racks full off effects for all different situations. These players are different to you as they have to be able to recreate any given sound at the speed of light for a record producer. They also have a road crew to cart the racks around the studios and a sound and programming person, which I presume you don't have.

If you are doing home recording it is a good idea to play your guitar clean onto the recorder and then add effects later. For example if you record with too much reverb you can't take it off in the mix down process, but you can add or take it off if you do it after the guitar is recorded.

For recording purposes using the same pedals you use on stage can tend to increase the noise on the recording because stage pedals have a high gain. That means they are noisy when you turn the volume level up. Most people who record buy special recording studio effect units, which are less noisy when recording. They are also more expensive but well worth the money paid out for them.

## **Digital or Analog**

Many people ask which is best, digital or analog format? It is a matter of preference. Analog effects use valve or the old style technology, whereas digital uses the latest technology. Personally I prefer the analog overdrive sound, and digital delay and chorus. They are the only effects I use most of the time. Analog tends to sound warmer to me, however I know a lot of great players who prefer all digital. It would pay to try before you buy and hear what you like the best.

To conclude, if you buy an overdrive, delay, chorus, wah-wah, and reverb pedals first, you will have the most used effects at your ready. The other different types can come

later if you want them. It is important to listen carefully to your favourite performers to find out what effects they use. Then you should get the ones they tend to use.

Also remember effects can't cover up bad playing, and don't use one effect all the time as it gets boring. For recording you will need studio quality effects.

I hope this article sheds some light on the different effect pedals and racks you can buy.

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