



Revival of the Fittest

ORIGIN EFFECTS RD COMPACT HOT ROD

By Paul Riario

▶ THE UNSHAKABLE FEALTY many a guitarist has for their favorite dirt device is a hard thing to shatter. No doubt, when a new type of gain pedal emerges, it's an uphill battle to persuade these stompbox stalwarts to be open-minded and eschew any skepticism. And understandably, I get that most of the latest drives are — more or less — variations of the iconic “Screamer” ilk. However, every so often, a contemporary overdrive comes along that is unlike anything else and is so convincingly good in nailing the sound of a tube amp roaring at full-tilt that it becomes apparent we may have a new best-in-class. That accolade, as far as I'm concerned, goes to the Origin Effects RD Compact Hot Rod, a condensed and hot-rodded version of their award-winning large-format RevivalDrive and RevivalDrive Compact stompboxes. The RD Compact Hot Rod is not your garden-variety overdrive, nor is it a “Klone” or an ersatz amp-modeling pedal. This is a serious all-analog tone-shaping tool with more gain and sustain, and one that allows complete control over dialing in the same harmonic content, responsiveness and filthy richness a classic, heavily modded tube amp offers when pushed to its limit.

FEATURES UK-based Origin Effects hand-builds and tests each of their pedals to endure a lifetime of use, which is why the RD Compact Hot Rod feels substantial and is ruggedly overbuilt. Compared to the intricately crammed and daunting control set of Origin's two-channel RevivalDrive, the RD Compact Hot Rod is much less intimidating and smartly streamlined for plug-in and play. But don't mistake fewer controls for less versatility or sonic complexity; the pedal is every bit as nuanced as the RevivalDrive — just more intuitive. The six knobs react very much like the topology of a tube amp, with Output, Gain and Blend (mix between the dry input signal and overdriven signal) operating as intended. Highs increases both the high



and mid-frequency content while keeping everything tight, Lows regulates the bass, and the More/Pres combines two parameters that affect the negative feedback in the output stage (turning clockwise boosts highs like a Presence knob, and counterclockwise reduces the negative feedback resulting in an earlier breakup). Certain settings on these EQ knobs will replicate the behavioral characteristics and preamp voicings of some legendary, modified tube amps. The Post-Drive EQ controls offer additional tone shaping via a three-position switch with P/AMP (for plugging into a flat-response power amp, FX return, mixer or

recording interface), EQ1 (for brighter-sounding amps) EQ2 (for darker-sounding, mid-heavy amps), and the ADJ knob (for further fine-tuning the high-frequency response for EQ1 and EQ2). The pedal features all-analog circuitry, high-current/low-noise electronics, ultra-high input impedance, silent switching, a high-quality buffered bypass and is powered by a 9V DC adapter.

PERFORMANCE While I generally forgo the included sample settings manual, I must admit for this pedal, it's a great place to start. Setting the Post-Drive EQ mini-toggle to EQ1 (I don't have many dark-sounding amps) and turning the interactive EQ controls to try out both “Brown Sound” and “Liverpool Hot Rod” suggestions, you're instantaneously met with a ferociously-saturated and cutting tone that compliments your existing rig. The pedal makes an obvious nod to vintage amps like Fender, Marshall and Vox, but it's striking how realistic it sounds and feels like a hot-wired version of these classics. The EQ controls are great for adding overall body and percussive tightness to your tone, and I surprisingly found myself setting the More/Pres knob counterclockwise for more of that responsive “sag” that apes a variac. As mentioned before, moving the EQ knobs in certain settings and using the Gain and Blend knobs to affect the amount of drive will get you shades of a classic Fender snarl or gritty Vox chime, but if anything, the RD Hot Rod is very much a searingly hot Marshall Plexi on steroids. It may sound clichéd, but the RD Hot Rod reacts in a totally tube-like manner — it just has the most natural feel, wide-open dynamics and presence of any drive pedal I've come across in recent memory. Where other overdrives and distortions become overly compressed, mid-heavy and crumbly in their crunch, the RD Hot Rod stays smooth and precise in its gain structure, with a tight bottom end and just the right amount of stinging compression where notes sing and harmonic overtones blossom. It's not a cheap pedal, but it's a worthwhile investment if you care about having one of the best musical overdrives available.

CHEAT SHEET



STREET PRICE:

\$390

MANUFACTURER:

Origin Effects,
origineffects.com

- The Post-Drive EQ switch and ADJ knob voices the pedal to match your amp, along with a P/AMP setting when using a power amp, recording interface, DI or mixer.

- The More/Pres control affects negative feedback in the output stage and can modify the breakup characteristics or respond similarly to a Presence knob.

● THE BOTTOM LINE

The Origin Effects RD Compact Hot Rod is an unparalleled hot-rodded overdrive stompbox with nuanced complexity and response for dialing in super-detailed tube-like amp tones that are downright mesmeric.