

# JHS Rock-Box

**It looks like a Rockman, it feels like a Rockman, but does it sound like a Rockman?  
Paul White puts one through its paces.**



**I** make no apologies for making direct comparisons between this unit and the original Rockman, as the Rock-Box has been deliberately designed to look like and offer similar facilities to the Rockman.

Basically, the Rock-Box allows the guitarist to practice using the lightweight headphones provided, and the built-in effects units enable a highly produced studio type of sound to be achieved.

Like its innovative forerunner, the Rock-Box provides a stereo output and this may be connected directly to a mixing desk for recording.

The unit is actually built into a substantial metal case and power is normally obtained from batteries, though an external  $\pm 6$  volt DC pack may be used instead.

## Facilities

The only variable control is the output volume, everything else is preset and can only be switched in or out.

A six position rotary switch forms the heart of the control panel and in its first position, it gives a 440Hz (A) tone so that you can tune up.

One step round is the position labelled 'Normal', which gives a fairly neutral guitar tone but with a fair degree of compression. The next two positions are designated 'Clean 1' and 'Clean 2', both offering brighter sounds, the second version producing an almost nasal Dire Straits effect.

Lastly come two distorted settings, 'O-

drive' and 'Dist' which effectively give you dirty and very dirty sounds respectively.

To all these sounds may be added delay and/or chorus, if so desired, at the mere press of a couple of buttons, and an effects send and return loop lets you patch in your own external effects, which is a good idea.

Mono or stereo line outputs are available on quarter inch jacks and an auxiliary jack input is provided so that you can plug in a second instrument, bypassing the effects. To turn on the power, the main input jack must be inserted and so it is not possible to use the auxiliary input on its own unless you plug a jack into the main input as well.

Though the effects are preset, a screwdriver adjustment is provided to alter the delay depth, allowing some variation to be effected by the user.

## Sounds

All the sounds are subject to a fairly high degree of compression giving a tight, produced sound but it does tend to emphasise squeaky fingering or buzz from badly screened pick-ups.

The preset chorus is really very good, especially in stereo, giving a feeling of depth and movement without any obvious pitch change effects.

Likewise the delay; this uses a multi-tapped analogue delay chip to create an effect somewhere in between echo and reverb and both these effects are very like the ones in the original Rockman, adding

greatly to the 'produced' (or even overproduced) effect.

All three clean settings are distinctly different and very useable and, unlike the Rockman system, you can turn off both the delay and chorus if you want to.

Inevitably, the high degree of compression and equalisation brings up the background noise, but in all fairness, it is probably no worse than that produced by a good amp with the same effects connected.

The overdrive effect is certainly dirty though obviously not quite an exact simulation of a steaming Marshall stack and the distortion setting is the same but more so.

Using chorus and delay improves these dirty sounds and gives a fair imitation of the classic American rock sound.

Plugging the Rock-Box into a studio mixer certainly gives good instant sounds, particularly in stereo, though you do need to use the EQ carefully and watch the noise levels.

The manufacturers of this type of equipment generally state that it can be used live by connecting it to a suitable power amp. From personal experience, this has never proved very successful, as the end result has been thin and noisy, with a high risk of feedback due to the built-in compressor.

Still, that's not where its real strength lies, so I can't really blame it for that.

## Conclusions

In many respects, this does sound like a Rockman and indeed, it has some advantages such as the effects loop and the fully switchable chorus and delay, but I didn't find the dirty settings quite as satisfying.

The sound in the headphones is simply huge. The stereo delay and chorus give the impression of immense size. At very high listening levels, the headphones started to protest a bit.

At a recommended retail price of under £100, the Rock-Box offers exceedingly good value for money and its flattering sound tends to motivate one to practice more often and for longer. The benefits of private practice are also enjoyed by the rest of the player's family in the form of peace and quiet, so if little Johnny's Van Halen riffs are getting on your nerves, this could be an ideal present!

 Paul White

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