

## HARDWIRE

# CM-2 Tube Overdrive, DL-8 Delay/Looper and SC-2 Valve Distortion

BY OSCAR JORDAN

DigiTech has a long history of coming up with nifty treats for guitar players, and its HardWire pedals—which are now marketed under their own name—continue the tradition. These stompboxes are designed for guitarists who want quality, heavy-duty construction and guitar-centric features. Each of these pedals is built like a Cylon Centurion and features precision-machined, high-grade components and true-bypass circuitry to keep your tones intact.

The CM-2 Tube Overdrive, DL-8 Delay/Looper, and SC-2 Valve Distortion are built for sturdiness and have gig-friendly features and additions, including Velcro bottom pads, glow-in-the-dark labels (for night vision!), and a trademarked StompLock cap, that prevents you from accidentally changing settings with your foot. In addition, the footswitch cover on top of each unit can easily be opened for quick access to the battery—no screwdriver needed. Another cool feature is constant-voltage operation: each pedal has circuitry that boosts the voltage supplied by its 9-volt battery to a higher operating voltage (15 volts). This adds more volume, gives you *mucho* headroom, prevents unwanted distortion, and results in tones that sound cleaner in your effects loop. Constant high voltage keeps your sound from degrading when your battery runs dry and avoids that boxy sound you sometimes hear in other pedals. All the pedals are set up for use with an AC optional adapter as well.

For this test, I got down to business with my trusty Performance Custom Strat, a Yamaha '78 SG2000, a '65 Fender Deluxe Reverb, a Blackheart Little Giant half stack, and a Peavey JSX 2x12 combo.

### CM-2 Tube Overdrive

The CM-2 Tube Overdrive is designed to give you that much-sought-after natural breakup you hear in overdriven amps. It's perfect for blues, blues rock, classic rock, or guys who just want to add a little girth to their tone. It has four intuitive knobs: Level, Low, High, and Gain. The knobs are metal and very solid, and they stay put without wiggling around. You also get two voicing modes to choose from. Classic gives you a smooth-but-dirty overdrive sound, and Modified adds more gain and beef. The Modified mode was my favorite, and with the help of the EQ I was able to dial in some hefty blues-rock tonal extrapolations somewhere between Stevie Ray Vaughan and Robin Trower.

What's cool is that I didn't hear a lot of compression in the Classic mode. It reminded me of a cranked Bassman about to explode, but without the volume. It's very organic yet lacks the midrange bump you sometimes hear in other overdrives. I ran the EQs at around 12 o'clock most of the time, and it sounded very rich and robust. Single notes sounded twice as thick, and chords got exponentially chunkier. It also cleaned up very well when I rolled back the guitar's volume. The Modified mode takes you to heavy blues-rock soloing land. I couldn't help but play Hendrix's "Voodoo Chile" (Not Slight Return). That added smidgen of compression, gain, and low end really makes this pedal an enabler for long-term pentatonic wanking. It's smooth, articulate, very thick—and best of all, quiet. I like this pedal a lot. When you back off your guitar's volume, you can get your sound to return to the Classic mode without bending down to flick the switch. Nice.



Rating: 

### Buy If...

*you like warm, versatile overdrive pedals.*

### Skip If...

*you like lots of midrange.*

HardWire  
Street \$99  
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*Head online or use a mobile device to read this QR code to hear sound samples of the CM-2 in action at*



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### DL-8 Delay/Looper

The DL-8 Delay/Looper combines a very basic looper function with lots of super-cool delay settings. The four rock-solid adjustable knobs give you the ability to control the Level, Repeats, delay Time, and six delay modes: Reverse, Modulated, Analog, Slapback, LoFi, and Tape. You also get four digital settings, a Looper setting, and a Tails on/off switch feature. You can have all these sounds in mono or stereo. The tap tempo is easy to use when you need to get in time with the music, and you can get delay times ranging from 10 milliseconds to 8 seconds. Overall, the layout is very easy to use, and you'll have fun making up wacky delay



sensitive side. I was able to dial in pretty much everything from a smattering of amp breakup à la Jimmy Page to face-melting shred. You get four knobs: Level, Low, High, and Gain. You get two settings: Crunch and Saturated. The Crunch mode gives you... Crunch. That's classic Marshall-esque overdrive/distortion with a mid boost and harmonic overtones a plenty. The Saturated setting scoops out the mids and gives you the kind of gain you would need if you wanted to drop in onstage with Iron Maiden.

Guitarists are persnickety when it comes to distortion pedals, and I like distortion pedals with warmth. This pedal has it. There's nothing sterile sounding going on here. I was able to navigate my guitar's tone to everything from clean boost to dirty blues, from AC/DC right on up to Metallica. It's got a lot of range despite the fact that my first impulse was to max the gain, back off on the highs, and pump the bass. It sounded awesome! There's a lot going on as you back off on the gain, yet it always retains a wonderfully natural, tubey warmth. The scooped mids are righteous! It also gets that classic, notched-wah Michael Schenker thing without sounding muddy.

When I cranked the highs, I got a nice, usable cutting tone that could slice through any band mix without becoming ice picky. It's a versatile pedal that would work great for blues, shred, or jamming on Anthrax tunes. And the best thing about this pedal is that it will stay warm no matter what.

**The Final Mojo**

My favorite pedals are the ones with thin instruction manuals. I just want to play guitar, and thankfully the HardWire instruction manuals are thin. Great pedals should be intuitive, have the sturdiness to endure abuse, sound glorious, and enhance your art. The HardWire pedals do all these things at a reasonable price. Don't let pre-conceptions of these pedals fool you. You can coax sounds from across the spectrum out of all these tantalizing tone tanks. Clean players can find transparent boost, subtle slapback, and the smallest of amp breakup, while those seeking heaviness can gorge themselves on relentless blues-rock sustain, arena-style delays, and brutally crushing distortion. Check 'em out. You won't be sorry.

**Rating:**

**Buy If...**  
you want a compact delay with lots of features.

**Skip If...**  
you prefer a one-trick-pony delay pedal.

HardWire  
Street \$159  
hardwirepedals.com

**HEADOnline...**

Head online or use a mobile device to read this QR code to hear sound samples of the DL-8 in action at

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**Rating:**

**Buy If...**  
you want to experience the power and the glory.

**Skip If...**  
you don't understand the fury of rock.

HardWire  
Street \$99  
hardwirepedals.com

**HEADOnline...**

Head online or use a mobile device to read this QR code to hear sound samples of the SC-2 in action at

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settings that you would probably never use in an actual band situation. You'll also get a kick out of the Reverse mode. The Looper gives you 20 seconds of recording time, but unfortunately there's no way to save it and call it up later.

I had a ball dialing in rockabilly slapback, chimey repeats for arpeggios, and my take on Brian May-esque long echoes. The Modulated setting sounded awesome. That teeny bit of chorus really fattens up your sound, and the repeats are crystal clear. The Analog mode, which has a warmer, old-school quality, can go from 35 milliseconds to 1 second and has that classic breakup

and degeneration. If you need classic tape echo, this pedal does that too. My only issue with these kinds of pedals is that the last thing you want to do onstage is bend over and change delay settings. Performers who are into hardcore looping or need to change delay settings at the drop of a hat might consider getting a dedicated looper and separate delay pedals.

**SC-2 Valve Distortion**

Do you long for high-gain distortion? Scooped metal tones? Brutalicious chunk? The SC-2 Valve Distortion delivers the goods, but it's more than just a killing machine in a stompbox. It has a