

Guitar Player

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GEAR Bench Test



TC Electronic Nova System

TESTED BY JUDE GOLD

SPECS | TC Electronic, (818) 665-4900; tcelectronic.com

MODEL	Nova System
PRICE	\$995 retail/\$699 street
I/O	Line input (for use with effects loops); Drive input (for running in front of amp; adds Drive effects to signal path); Left, Right outputs; Digital in/out; MIDI in/thru/out; Pedal input (for optional expression pedal or TC-Helicon G-Switch preset changer)
EFFECTS BLOCKS	Distortion (medium overdrive or heavy distortion), Compression (three types), Modulation (chorus, flanger, vibrato, phaser, tremolo, panner), Pitch (octave, "wham", detune, standard or intelligent pitch shifter), Delay (clean, analog, tape, dynamic, dual, ping pong), Reverb (spring, hall, room, plate), EQ, Noise Gate, and Boost.
DIMENSIONS	3.25" x 9" x 11"
WEIGHT	6.7 lbs
KUDOS	A smorgasbord of pro effects. Pedalboard-like ease of use. Programmable analog distortion. Rugged and compact.
CONCERNS	Utilities functions have steep learning curve. Slight pause before distortion engages after hitting Drive switch.

IN SOME WAYS, THE NEXT CLOSEST EXPERIENCE to walking the NAMM show floor is a quick stroll through MusicPlayer headquarters. Here, with the constant influx of review gear sent to *Keyboard*, *EQ*, *Bass Player*, and, of course, *Guitar Player*, there's an ever-flowing river of new stuff pouring through the halls—a river so deep and wide that not even the wildest new guitar design or wackiest new musical accessory is enough to garner a second glance from the jaded NAMM vets working nearby. That being said, when the TC Electronic Nova System arrived and I got it set up on my desk, there was something so intriguing about the blinking marvel of guitar technology that it stopped even the hippest gear geeks in their tracks.

Perhaps it's the brushed aluminum faceplate and eight chromed-out footswitches—each surrounded by a glowing LED ring (including the hypnotic, ever-flashing ring around the Tap Tempo switch)—that make this

compact multi-effector such an eyeball magnet. Or maybe people are drawn to it because, true to TC tradition, its looks imply top-of-the-line signal processing and bulletproof construction. The biggest draw may be that, visually speaking, the Nova System seems to exude mammoth power such as you might find on a console in the Death Star—as if it could perhaps blow up a small planet. Heck, even the *Keyboard* guys were stopping by to check out this gleaming processor. Luckily, you don't have to be an editor at *Keyboard* to understand how the Nova System works.... Or do you?

First, the simple stuff. The Nova System's greatest appeal is that when it's in Pedal mode, it's like having seven different stompboxes—effects from the modulation, delay, gain boost, harmonization, reverb, compression, and distortion families of sounds (as the corresponding button names imply)—at your feet, coexisting peacefully in a compact, ergonomically friendly hull with an internal power supply. (No wall wart—yay!) The only footswitch that doesn't turn an effect on or off is the Tap Tempo button, which can be tapped to sync delay and modulation times to the groove, or held to activate silent tuning. (There are also très hip sharp/flat indicator LEDs constantly active in the Preset Bank/Tune LED display that allow you to tune anytime.)

Changing effects within a given effects block is easy. For instance, to scroll through the different delay sounds associated with the Delay footswitch, press the Delay select/edit button on the upper panel to audition Analog, Dual, Ping Pong, and other echo settings. Tweak effect parameters as necessary using the Edit encoder knobs on the right side of the same panel, stashing alternate settings using the four handy Variation buttons. Once you have all seven effects blocks set to your liking and have decided on effects routing (such as running the Mod, Pitch, Delay, and

Reverb blocks in series or in parallel), store the entire configuration as one of 60 user presets. That's right: In addition to the 30 factory presets, the Nova System essentially allows you to create a whopping 60 different custom “pedalboards.” While switching presets is easiest in Preset mode, it can still be done in Pedal mode (the mode many guitarists will use) by pressing and holding the appropriate footswitches.

The Nova System's distortion comes in two flavors (crunch or full-on raging), and is as fully programmable and storable as nearly any other Nova effect, yet is—get this—100 percent analog. This is a welcome feature for anyone who has discovered that digitally modeled distortion—the kind found on many floor-based processors—doesn't always cut through on the bandstand without sounding a tad harsh. Though the Nova distortion is alive with sizzling, complex mids and highs and froths with plenty of snarl, it actually lies on the smoother, more compressed half of the overdrive spectrum, and some players may prefer their distortion a little more rude sounding. Asked to come up with a “big, triumphant U2 sound” at a recent session, I ran the Nova distortion near full saturation while creating a wet stereo spread through Fender Vibrolux and Rivera Venus 3 combos using a huge dual delay setting à la the Edge. A wondrously decadent, full-spectrum modern rock texture ensued, and I triumphantly had the producer smiling the second he heard the sound.

While tweaking and storing effects on the Nova System is easy, navigating its Utilities menu, Levels settings, and printed manual (which surely must read more clearly in its original Danish than it does in its current English translation) can be more than a little befuddling at times. For instance, my test model Nova System stayed home from its first gig because, after programming

a few presets, I switched the Nova System's input to Digital out of sheer curiosity. As I expected, the unit went silent. No biggie. But when I switched the input back to Analog, my rig was *still* silent! The Nova System had gone mute, and no matter what I tried, the only audible sound was that of me cursing. I was eventually able to get the box up and rocking again, but only after executing the global Clear System command, which nuked all of my user Presets. Ouch. Luckily, this glitch can be remedied by downloading a software upgrade at tcelectronic.com—an upgrade that also adds speaker emulation (for direct recording) to the Nova System's list of talents.

Utilities quirks aside, the Nova System is to lower- and medium-end floorboard processors what the BMW 7 series is to entry-level Toyotas and Hondas—incredibly refined, ridiculously powerful, loaded with cool bells and whistles, and yes, significantly more expensive. Luckily, high-end circuits tend to come in increasingly small packages these days, and the Nova System is no exception to that rule. In an age when fuel prices are so high that many airlines won't let you check more than one bag without a cruel up-charge, monster pedalboards are more likely than ever to stay at home—especially when you have the overhead-bin-friendly Nova System at your disposal. With thick flanges, 3-D chorus tones, a wide range of pitch effects (including “Whammy”-style scoops and dives when an expression pedal is attached), pristine delays, juicy phasing, and myriad other effects taken straight from TC's flagship G-System processor—plus articulate analog overdrive—this little box replaces a huge board of quality pedals and patch cables while still delivering impeccable sound and quick, tactile access to effects parameters. It does, for the most part, exactly what any modern guitarist would want a floor processor to do.

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