

# once over

BY MIKE METLAY

You can tell how long someone's been in the audio business by what they think of when they hear "TC Electronic". In the 21st Century, computer-centric musicians think of the PowerCore DSP engine; in the '90s the big deal was the Finalizer mastering processor; but go back far enough and TC means guitar effects.

TC effects stood out from the crowd even then: built like high-end audio equipment, AC powered, noiseless and gorgeous sounding, they exuded class. TC never stopped building its most popular pedal, the Stereo Chorus Flanger, and recently reintroduced its other classic pedals. But that's not all—a new series of compact effects, the Nova Series, is poised to meld TC's guitar-friendly heritage with the DSP power of its modern effects racks. I had a chance to play with the first two Nova Pedals, the ND-1 Nova Delay and the NR-1 Nova Reverb.

## In common

Nova pedals are programmable true stereo pedals with unbalanced inputs (at 1 Megohm impedance, suitable for use with guitars) and balanced outputs, all on 1/4" TRS. Both inputs and outputs auto-sense if only one cable is plugged in, and switch to mono operation (including intelligently mixing stereo inputs and effects down to mono if needed). Power is supplied by a detachable wall-mount 12VDC supply; battery power isn't an option.

Construction and fit are TC-standard, which is to say solid and beautiful: aluminum faceplate, steel chassis, no plastic except the knobs and buttons. The two stomp switches are noiseless.

## ND-1 Nova Delay

The Nova Delay harks back to TC's famous 2290 rack delay, offering up to 2290 ms of delay in six different Types: Delay Line, Dynamic, Ping Pong, Pan, Reverse (1000 ms max) and Slap (300 ms max). A couple of these modes require some explanation.

In Pan mode, the echo taps move slowly back and forth across the soundstage. Dynamic is the 2290's famous mode



## Nova Delay and Reverb

where echo level is turned down as signal level grows, so busy playing has less echo and fades and tails have more. (To make best use of this mode, you must calibrate the Delay's inputs to your instrument's output level, a procedure described in the manual.) Reverse does in fact play back echoes in reverse, a bizarre effect that takes some practice to play effectively.

The five knobs are Delay Time (which isn't an absolute setting like the others—it increments or decrements by turning it right or left from its center detent), Feedback, Color (high-frequency rolloff), Mod Level, and Mix Level. A large 4-digit LED display displays times and settings.

Five buttons select deeper functions: Manual or Preset modes, Mod Style (which chooses one of three modulation types), Type (for selecting the delay algorithm), and Subdiv (which accesses tempo-tap control settings). You can select various rhythmic subdivisions with the option of dotted or triplet notes, set up polyrhythms between left and right channels, and display delay times in BPM rather than ms. Front-panel LEDs indicate rhythmic subdivision and mod style choices, and serve double duty

## Guitar stomp boxes grow up

as indicators of other functions as explained in the manual.

Nine presets can be stored by the user, and cycled through with the stomp switches... or if you prefer you can cycle through fewer of them (anywhere from one to eight), if those are all you usually need in the course of a song. The procedure is explained neatly in the manual.

The audio quality of the Nova Delay is, simply put, studio level. No noise, clean, clear, and with as much or as little character as you care to dial in with the Color knob. The Mod settings are subtle, but add a nice chorusing to the sound, and a defeatable function called Delay Spill-over allows echoes to continue uninterrupted even when you change presets, so there aren't any jarring transitions. There's a wide range of echo styles in this box, from classic slapback to otherworldly cascades of polyrhythmic repeats.

## NR-1 Nova Reverb

The Nova Reverb offers five reverb types with a total of 18 subtypes, selected by the five front panel buttons. The five knobs

control Decay Time, Predelay, Color, Mix Level, and an interesting function called Dynamix—a reverb version of the Nova Delay's Dynamic delay function, which can be added to any reverb type. Unlike the Nova Delay, this Dynamix is reversible—you can set it to duck the reverb when playing loudly and bring it up when sounds are trailing off, or to get denser as playing gets louder. A single preset can be stored and accessed with the Preset stomp-switch, or the unit can be set to Manual mode, where parameters match the actual control settings.

The algorithms include four Rooms (including a bright, ringy Tiled Room), three very funky Springs with varying degrees of vintage mud, five Halls ranging from Small to Concert, three Plates, and three Specials: an early reflection/ambience preset, a heavily modulated reverb, and a trebly, ringy Stomp reverb. A defeatable Spill-over mode allows reverb to ring out when you bypass the pedal; the manual describes the button-push sequence to set this up or defeat it.

The reverbs are dense and full of character, with a fair bit of color tweaking available. My only real gripe with them was that the maximum reverb time wasn't very long—the NR-1 provides more traditional rooms, plates, and springs, rather than really long special-effects reverbs. But that's not the traditional realm of a stompbox reverb, so it's not really a downcheck, more a matter of personal taste.

## Conclusions

By now you may have noted how many times I've said "in the manual". The Nova Pedals are much deeper than your usual stomp boxes, despite their small size. They pack a lot of power into very little space, and that means that many switches and indicators serve multiple functions. You won't get the most out of these pedals without reading the manual first—in fact I'd argue that without the manual you might not be able to get them to work properly at all. That might be a turnoff to some users, who believe stompboxes should be straightforward and obvious in their functions.

On the other hand, if you're looking to have something really special in your studio for visiting guitarists who are hoping for a higher grade of effects power and quality than they might have themselves, the Novas are worth the time and effort of reading their manuals and learning the many hidden control sequences. They really do put studio-quality processing under a guitarist's sweaty sneakers, and they do it, once again, with class.

**Prices:** \$345 each

**More from:** TC Electronic, 5706 Corsa Ave. Suite 107, Westlake Village, CA 91362. 818/665-4900, [www.tcelectronic.com](http://www.tcelectronic.com).