

Detailed Review of the Celestial Effects Gemini VTR By Gio Da Silva 2 July 2013

Modulation, the “sonic sauce” guitar players have relied on for decades to add texture and push the boundaries of what the electric guitar can accomplish as a rhythm and solo instrument.

The Gemini VTR (VTR = Vibrato Tremolo Reverb), recently released by Celestial Effects, is a killer combination of two modulation effects and a versatile reverb unit in one, yes you read it right, one pedal. The second in the line of multiple effects units from CE (excluding the Mark Farner approved Librarian), follows the pattern well established by CE: killer tone, quality build using the finest components, ingenuity, and another stunning pedal to look upon.

As it is standard operating procedure at CE, new pedals are not simply released; instead designer, Dom Mancini and crew, take their time with concept design, build, beta testing and tweaking until the unit is right.

The Gemini arrived at my door, neatly packed with the usual complimentary guitar pick and rubber feet for those who need them. Each of the Gemini's three effects provide a lot of versatility on their own, but the cool thing is that unlike some other types of dual or multi effects pedals, each section works both independently as well as in conjunction with the other two, to afford a vast array of flavors for those who seek.

Let us start with the simplest of the three effects, and although located in the middle of the pedal, it is the last in the chain of effects in the Gemini, namely the powerful reverb section. Although it is controlled by only one knob labeled “reverb mix” the range of textures achieved by this analog opamp based combined with a digital tank simulator will take you from mild, to giant cave-sized reverb.

In order to keep the front panel free of clutter, there are two internal trim pots to adjust the reverb level and tone. These internal trims, specially the tone adjustment, are a 100% must have when dialing in reverb tones, especially if you plan to use a reverb pedal in front of the amp. Some preamp sections can be rather shrill when dealing with reverbs, but the Gemini can be easily adjusted to accommodate these amp-generated issues.

I took the Gemini for a ride using my silverface Vibrolux and a Wreck-inspired amp, and was able to dial in anything from just a bit of ambience to bring a dead sounding room to life, to surf guitar approved mile-long reverb, and finally under extreme settings, Cocteau Twins sonic mayhem.

How did it compare under similar settings on my Vibrolux? Well I know the stigma of silverface amps, but I happen to have one of the good ones, and pound for pound the Gemini wins, because a tone adjustment in a reverb is mandatory, in my opinion. Those who enjoy the hugely “reverberated” tone conjured by Joe Bonamassa, will love the reverb in the Gemini. I have started using the reverb at a fixed setting and leave it on 100% of the time.

Tremolo, an effect used for decades to add textures and percussive feel to songs, is one of those “must have” for guitar players who appreciate sonic explorations beyond the guitar-into-amp setup. The Gemini's tremolo section is as robust as some of the well established boutique companies at large and has some interesting design features, which to me are new (I may stand corrected), at least when these are located all in one pedal.

The Gemini's tremolo section sports three control knobs for speed, depth, and duty cycle. The speed and depth knobs are the obvious controls usually found in tremolo pedals, but the icing on the cake here is the duty cycle function. I will do my best to explain this, but feel free to ask CE directly, or better yet do some reading and check out the owner's manual provided at <http://www.celestialeffects.com/gemini.html>.

Simply put, the duty cycle controls the ON-OFF ratio of each volume-attenuated pulse. At 12 o'clock it is a 50-50 mix of ON-OFF, the setting you would find in most other tremolos. Stray from this standard setting and you are into exploration land! Really cool, sometimes strange sounds can be obtained, but all very musical.

Another killer feature of the tremolo section is found in the internal trim pots for tone and volume. Yes you read it right, a volume boost can be obtained when stomping on the tremolo, and I love what it does. The tremolo section can be used for swampy CCR-approved goodness, to percussive madness a la Oz Noy.

Last, but certainly not least, the Vibrato section. This is the most elusive of all modulation effects, and one often ignored by designers and builders. You see, seldom, since the days of Magnatone, has a true, pitch-shifting vibrato hit the market. Well, the Gemini fills this market gap and does so in outstanding fashion.

The controls here are very similar to the tremolo section (speed, depth, duty cycle, internal trim pots for volume and tone) with the addition of a square or triangle wave options accessible by a toggle switch.

The difference between the vibrato and tremolo section is that in the former a low frequency oscillator is used to trigger two phase-shifting engines. Sounds fancy? It is! Of course, because of all the possible settings combinations in the vibrato section alone, although you can get Maggie-approved warm and lush vibrato, it is much more than just a replica of that celebrated tone. You can indeed conjure up the sounds of Hendrix, Trower, and in some settings get a nice faux-leslie/chorusing effect going. With a fuzz tone, it is psychedelic goodness!

The Gemini VTR stands alone in the world of effects as a cleverly designed and versatile tool. It is the kind of pedal, like most of the other CE effects line-up that can get you a great tone right off the start. However, like all other pedals in the Celestial range, the reward really comes from delving deep into the functionality provided. When combining all three effects in the Gemini, one can let hours go by with pushing the boundaries of what modulation can do.

The Gemini VTR is a tool of inspiration and exploration. It will never leave my pedal board.