

Detailed Review of the
Celestial Effects
Capricorn Rock Distortion Pedal
By
Gio da Silva
27 November 2012

This may be the briefest, yet most difficult review I have had to write. I have started about a dozen times, and just stopped; mostly because superlatives, and flowery use of the vernacular made the text a bit, well, silly. Those drafts I will save for my wedding vows. I will instead keep this simple, short and sweet, because if you care about great tone, you need a Celestial Effects Capricorn.

I have had the pleasure of playing all of the other drive-generating machines in the Celestial line, and they are without doubt impressive interpretations/improvements of some familiar tones, save of course for the genius of the Aquarius and Scorpio, and the unique sonic diversity of the Cancer. I also have owned more distortion pedals than any other type of drive-generating preamps, so to be impressed is a tall order indeed. Briefly, the typical facts about the quality of Celestial Effects products apply to the Capricorn: Visually stunning, built like a tank with top shelf components, totally hand built, and with a great warranty. Packaging upon receipt was as always neat, safe, with some extra "case candy."

Now let us discuss tone. My signal chain consisted of all Celestial pedals in front of the Capricorn, as I prefer to go from lowest to highest gain, with only the Scorpio being after in the path. Guitars included my trusty Firebird, a G&L Legacy, and a Les Paul Traditional, all going into my Orange Rocker 30 head and 1x15 cab.

The pedal has 4 knobs, including Volume, Limit, Edge, and Gain, but also a 3-position switch for added tonal versatility. You read it correctly; there is no tone knob on the Capricorn!! This is an extremely unique and ballsy feature, and I was skeptical at first, since EQ, in my opinion is everything when it comes to tone shaping. The volume knob controls the overall output of the pedal as any other drive/distortion unit, and there is PLENTY of volume boost on tap. The next knob is the Limit knob, and according to the tech talk from designer Dom Mancini, it is like a boost section similar to the Scorpio placed before the main gain stages. For the layman like me, that just means there is a kick-ass input gain adjustment. Next comes the Edge and Gain controls and they both in work together to not only shape the amount of drive but also in conjunction with the Limit knob, seem to shape the frequency of the drive character. Therein lies the secret of the Capricorn's lack of a tone knob; it does NOT need one as evil-yet-benevolent tonemaster general Dom Mancini managed to EQ the pedal through purely manipulating gain structures and the adjustment of the component values. Absolutely unique to me and deserving of a Nobel Prize in tonal badassery, if there was one!

It is not an easy pedal to deal with at first, but it is 100% set it and forget it, as it is extremely touch sensitive pedal as another fellow guitarist from Seattle, recently noted when taking it for a ride. The 3-position switch engages clipping stages to the circuit; in the middle position these are bypassed and the tone is giant, to say the least! Open, large, tight bottom and lush are some of the adjectives that come to mind. My favorite position however engages a MOSFET clipping stage (switch to the right), which adds some compression, and crazy amounts of harmonic complexity to the tone. It is the tone that I wished my amp's drive channel would have! Set to the right, silicon diodes provide even more singing sustain, a bit more compression and all the fluid character one needs for endless legato runs. No matter how you set the pedal the notes have a great compression/sag quality about them, and can go from tight to a bit spongier. The notes can have a nice fuzzy-character about them, just the right amount of hair under extreme settings. When combined with the other pedals from the Celestial effects line, it never failed to impress, and even with the Limit knob fully dimed, which one would think could quench the input gain, well, it remained totally responsive. It also worked just as well with the Scorpio placed after it as a standard boost. Depending on your guitar and amp rig, and of course your skill as a player, the Capricorn will take you from classic rock Kossoff-inspired tones, all the way through Ace Frehley and George Lynch quite easily. In my opinion, because of its nature, it is not a pedal for the lazy, it is not a pedal for the meek, and it is not a pedal a beginner player; this is the Dumble-equivalent, not in terms of how it sounds, rather in terms of uniqueness/impact and versatility, to the distortion pedal world. A bold statement, but I stand by it 100%.

I have stopped enjoying testing pedals by themselves, and now really believe that the ultimate test is live work. Take the gear out, and test it under real world conditions!! I played about a dozen gigs now with the Capricorn as my main drive, with single coil and humbucking guitars, playing Texas country, rock and roll, and even used it in an acoustic gig (yes I dared plug an acoustic into the Capricorn into the PA) with a very famous lead singer from a band that shall remain nameless, but rhymes with "reed", the pedal stayed on 100% of the time in each of those situations, I got all of my tones from using the volume knob and when more juice was needed, the Taurus and Scorpio were used. Actually for one recent honky-tonk gig I used my G&L, kept all three pedals on the whole time and went from spank to mean, depending on the part, with the volume knob on the guitar.

Pure genius; that is the last superlative, and perhaps the best one to describe the Capricorn. This is as brief as I can be.