

EARTHQUAKER DEVICES Plumes

BY DAVE HUNTER

Though they've long avoided jumping on the crowded Tube Screamer-clone bandwagon, EarthQuaker Devices has finally issued its own contestant in the TS wars. We're not surprised, however, to discover that this creative Akron, Ohio, pedalmaker is doing the TS thing very differently.

Green Meanie

EarthQuaker Devices calls the Plumes pedal a "small signal shredder," which we'll guess means "low- to medium-gain overdrive." The interface is gloriously simple, with controls for gain, tone, and level plus a 3-way clipping mode switch. These govern a cleverly conceived circuit that honors EQD founder Jamie Stillman's vow to never produce "just another Tube Screamer."

The circuit is op-amp based in classic TS style. And you hear a lot of headroom and clarity right off the bat. But the Plumes also delivers—courtesy of the 3-way mini-toggle—a choice of symmetrical LED clipping, no clipping (op-amp-driven boost only), or asymmetrical diode clipping. Combined with the extended range of the other controls and a tone knob that delivers "more bass to the left, more middles in the middle, and more treble to the right," as EQD puts it, there are a lot of sounds to explore.

The die-cast metal box is a standard 4 3/4" x 2 1/2" x 1 1/2", with top-mounted input, output, and center-negative DC jacks. The Flexi-Switching footswitch is nifty too: tap once for standard latching switching to activate the effect, tap again to turn it off; or, press and hold for momentary activation, then release to bypass it.

Three Ways to Clip (or Not)

I tested the Plumes with a Gibson 1958 Les Paul Reissue and a Fender Telecaster into a Friedman Small Box head and 2x12 cab, and a tweed Deluxe-style 1x12 combo. My main take-away was that while there's plenty of TS-like character here, this personality-rich pedal is unique enough to be categorized outside the TS family. For some players, it might even warrant a place alongside a favorite Screamer-style overdrive and used for contrasting dirt tones.

The Plumes exhibits more clarity and articulation than the typical Screamer, with enhanced string-to-string separation in dirty settings and none of the "TS haze" that many similar pedals slather over your basic tone. The midrange is slightly pronounced, which is typical of a TS-style pedal, though not distractingly so. Both low-end and high-end content are distinct and impressive. Of the three gain settings, I enjoyed the symmetrical LED

clipping most—mostly for its aggressive, Marshall-y grind when you wind the gain up past noon. But all three are useful and sound great in the right application, which, to my ears, is rowdy rock 'n' roll.

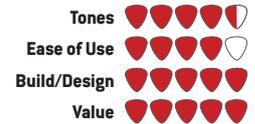
It's worth noting that switching between the three clipping modes isn't always viable if you're mid gig, because each clipping mode results in a very different output level. (No clipping is especially loud.) So flipping the switch usually means at least adjusting the master output control, too. But those differences also effectively make Plumes three-pedals-in-one, and that's a significant bonus.

The Verdict

The Plumes is a standout in the crowded TS-style overdrive market. And although it does many of the things you expect of a Tube Screamer very well, it produces many unique tones, too—all while coming in at a very impressive price. 



RATINGS



PROS A great sounding, versatile TS-style pedal with excellent clarity, good headroom, and plenty of grind when you need it.

CONS Drastic level changes when you move between clipping modes.

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**The Plumes
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Screamer."**