



Review from UK's Music Mart by Roger Cooper.

This UK made pedal presents a reserved but classy image, with sombre black highlighted by red and gold legends. The latter includes the signature of master guitarist Jerry Donahue, confirmation that this model in the Award range is the one endorsed and used by him.

Having already employed the Sessionmaster rackmount preamp to good effect, Donahue's request for a more portable, stand-alone equivalent resulted in the JD10.

Designed by Stewart Ward, this preamp is pure solidstate and similar in format to the DI boxes that comprise the Award Matchbox series, being housed in a compact but substantial metal casing.

It's powered by a 9V battery or via an external AC adapter (not supplied) and will accept any such device providing a positive or negative output of anything between 9 to 30V, a very forgiving and useful facility.

A single top mounted on-off footswitch is partnered by the appropriate LED indicator, while all other controls are located along the front, with the extended

sides and bottom of the case affording some protection from wayward feet.

The line-up consists of rotary knobs governing drive depth, treble, middle, bass and output level, plus two red pushbuttons. One of the latter selects rock or classic overdrive voicings, while the second brings in the G12T speaker simulation. White lines on the control knobs provide the only visual indication of settings, the casing being devoid of relevant references.

The rear panel keeps things simple with input and output jacks, mains supply socket and easy access battery compartment, while the base helpfully carries a printed resume of features and applications. The actual instruction booklet is concise but informative and includes a selection of suggested settings for stage and studio use, as the JD10 is intended to operate equally well in either context.

Combination of the various controls yield widely varying levels of distortion, from the subtlest crunch to flat-out raunch, all with appropriate tonality and very convincing valve powered depth and body. Tizz and fizz are notable by their absence, as is background noise - the JD10 is almost uncannily quiet in this respect, even on gain-heavy selections.

Used clean this pedal provides some very classy results too, and I managed to coax a very inspirational, almost acoustic

sound out of a solid thanks to what is a very flexible and wide-ranging EQ section.

Obviously any changes have to be achieved by adjusting the appropriate controls and, once the desired result is obtained, this can then be foot-switched in as a chosen ideal option to the straight amp sound.

Herein lies my main problem with the JD10: it provides so many good sounds that having to choose just one to use in this manner is a real headache. I'd like a row of the things, each set up as required!

The JD10 is a very impressive and versatile piece of gear - obviously Jerry Donahue and his Hellecaster compadres know a good thing when they hear it!



More information is only a phone call away... 01 256 477 222
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brief encounter

Award-Session Sessionmaster JD10

Guitar DI Box/Preamp

PAUL WHITE checks out the new Sessionmaster JD10 recording preamp, which provides the perfect excuse for half-an-hour's guitar practice at the company's expense!

You may remember the original rackmount Sessionmaster recording preamp (reviewed by Dave Lockwood in February 1992's *SOS*) — it was all-analogue, there was no programmability, and everything was controlled by knobs — just the way guitar players like it. MIDI didn't even get a look in!

The Sessionmaster JD10 sticks closely to this recipe for success, but this time the unit is packaged in a pedal format and features newly voiced circuitry designed in conjunction with top guitarist Jerry Donahue.

The JD10 may be powered from a 9V battery or from any AC or DC power adaptor, of any polarity rated at between 9 and 30V DC or 6 and 20V AC.

GET PEDALLING!

Housed within the tough steel case is a single-channel guitar preamp complete with traditional, passive three-band EQ, and overdrive depth and output gain controls. Nothing too revolutionary there — but

things get more interesting when you check out the Rock/Classic button. In the Classic position, the Drive Depth control can be turned down to give a natural clean tone, or advanced to give a vintage blues tone, and the blues tone is one of the great strengths of this little box. Many of the more elaborate guitar preamps fall flat on their face when trying to emulate those 'inbetween', subtly-overdriven amp sounds, but the Sessionmaster JD10 comes very close to the real thing, and lets the original tone of the guitar shine through.

Switch to Rock and the tones range from R&B raunch and '70s rock through to the heavily-saturated overdrive sounds that have dominated the '90s. Hitting the footswitch puts the unit into bypass mode, but rather than simply routing the input directly to the output, an impedance buffer is left in circuit which means that you can drive long leads without losing tone. In the studio, this also allows you to DI your guitar for a super clean sound without losing all the edge.

For recording overdrive sounds, the Speaker Simulator button brings in a filter which takes out the high-frequency harmonics and adds extra bite at around 3kHz. This works well in practice, but may also be used in conjunction with a guitar amp to thicken up the sound of single coil pickups to make them sound more like humbuckers.

IN USE

Unlike many overdrive units, this one is very quiet. You still get hum from your guitar pickups if you sit too close to a source of interference, but the level of hiss is extremely low, even at quite high overdrive gain settings. It's also possible to coax a much wider tonal range out of this little box than you might at first think possible — the secret is to experiment with very small changes in the control positions rather than trying to crank everything fully up or fully down. For me, the Sessionmaster JD10 excels in the area of producing classic blues sounds. The more

SESSIONMASTER JD10 £200

PROS

- Tonally flexible.
- Very quiet.
- Robust construction.
- Great for blues and vintage rock.
- Bypass setting can be used for DI'ing clean guitar and bass.

CONS

- The heavily overdriven sounds aren't quite so exciting as those produced by some other units.

SUMMARY

A neatly-designed product that will earn its keep both on stage and in the studio.

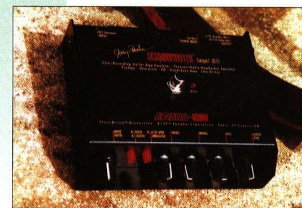
heavily-saturated rock sounds are still OK, and the Sessionmaster JD10 provides a great deal of touch response, allowing you to use picking pressure to vary the tone.

IN SHORT

The bottom line is, I suppose, that the Sessionmaster JD10 is a very simple-to-use, no-fuss guitar preamp that can be used both live and in the studio for just about any application where programmability or channel switching is not required. Used with an amp, you don't really need channel switching because you can use the amp's tone as one sound with the Sessionmaster JD10 in bypass mode, and then create your second sound with the unit turned on. And in the studio, if you want two guitar sounds in one track, it's usually just as easy to record them separately. All this little box needs is a touch of reverb to bring it alive, and as mentioned earlier, its greatest strength is its ability to recreate subtly distorted, classic amp sounds. I feel it's a definite improvement on the original Sessionmaster — and that was pretty good!

FURTHER INFORMATION

- 1 £199.95 inc VAT.
2 Radius International,
PO Box 3, RG24 9QA.
3 01256 477222.
4 01256 817687.



Still in production