

YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'VE GOT 'TIL IT'S OFF: ALWAYS-ON TONE CURES

IS THIS THING ON?

Greetings from the board of effectors pedalheads. It's your old pal Fletch here with a feature all about tonal flavor enhancers. The pedals detailed here today are some favorites of mine that I like to use for "always-on" tone treatments. These are the stompers that offer subtle sweetening to your core tone without transforming the amp sound that we love. Sometimes, it isn't even about tonal enhancement, but rather the dynamic feel that the pedal offers. One might think this article will be all about transparent boosters and one knob wonders and while a few detailed here today will fall into that category, there are many types of pedals that excel in this role. Often, turning them off is the only way to realize what you have been missing. Let's explore the sonic spice rack and cook up some subtly complex concoctions.

- WORDS BY: FLETCHER STEWART -

MXR MICRO AMP

This was the first always-on pedal that I ever messed with. The MXR Micro Amp is an absolute classic and it excels to this day as an end-of-line driver for long cables, a Strat fattener, or adding just a bit of combo-style blowout to the edges of a thin signal. I remember clearly (before all this boutique business) the day I swapped the Tube Screamer for an MXR

Micro Amp and it was a revelation. I said goodbye to the nasally mid-humped no-booty standard and hello to the full-frequency juicy boost of the little white one-knobber. I remember not being able to turn it off without feeling like I was missing something, which lead me down the rabbit hole of boost exploration and combinations. The fever had begun.



XOTIC EFFECTS EP BOOSTER

This little Echoplex preamp-in-a-box is still the king of the genre. It has been described by bedroom players and pros alike as "magic" and I couldn't agree more. It somehow remains warm and ever-so-slightly woolly (like a vintage tube combo working hard) while adding an extremely pleasing sparkle to the top end that never spikes out. I've had great success in the past with going direct in to a console for

a unique old-school amp-less sound. This is great for double stop solos or fat leads. The EP Booster soft clips as good or better than any solid-state amp I can think of and actually makes a great tube substitute when such an occasion should arise. I remember getting an amazing recording rig out of an '80s Marshall Lead 12 being juiced by the EP Booster. It sounded as good as my JCM 800 did at the time, which defies all logic.



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