

KEELEY ELECTRONICS

DS-9

REVIEW BY **YOEL KREISER**

STREET PRICE **\$149.00**



Few people know their dirt as well as Robert Keeley. An industry veteran, and one of the very first builders at the helm of the boutique revolution, Keeley got his start modifying existing pedals to sound superior to their stock incarnations. Keeley has probably seen the insides of more Tube Screemers, Blues Drivers, and RATs than their original designers! In the past few years Keeley has moved past his humble modder beginnings, taking his legendary knowledge of stompbox circuitry and staunch perfectionism, and applying it to his own unique designs. Keeley's

range has exploded beyond dirt in the past few years with the 30ms Double Tracker and his GC-2 Compressor, but his heart is still dirty. The latest little green man off Keeley's workbench is the DS-9, a humble overdrive and distortion that croons, belts, and howls.

The DS-9 is a sickly green, that same green that is usually identified with everyone's favorite overdrive (eye roll). Surprisingly, this pedal is not another clone, but an interesting hybrid of two cult classic pedals, the Maxon SD-9 and Boss DS-1. While this may seem like

an odd pair, Keeley has packed a whole lot of pedal into a small and affordable package. Starting on the front, we have controls for Level, Tone, Distortion, Cutoff, and in the middle is the switch for changing between the SD or DS modes. The Cutoff knob is essentially two knobs in one, as it controls the bass cutoff for the SD and DS. One of the reasons the original SD-9 was so loved (and the main gripe people had with it), was it didn't have that annoying low end cutoff that the Tube Screamer had. The main complaint was however, that the SD-9 was too

boomy, and generated a lot of unusable low-end noise. On SD mode, with the cutoff turned all the way to the left ("off" essentially), it still suffered from boominess and that low-end annoyance. I found having it at a little over 9 o'clock helped alleviate some of those boomier artifacts, but there was still a little too much low end disturbance for my taste. The Tone control is a filter, which gives you a high end cutoff, useful for taming the more shrill frequencies.

Plugging this pedal in, I set the pedal to SD mode and began to play. It is in the same ballpark as a Tube Screamer (as one would expect), but I find it was lot clearer and more balanced. Tube Screamers suffer from midrange congestion, as they are built for cutting through the mix. They do it well, but they can sound boxy at times. The DS-9 took away everything I dislike about a Tube Screamer, and brought to the forefront a beautiful, articulate, and very tube-like grit.

I know, I succumbed to the buzzword, but hear me out before you tar-and-feather me through the digital streets of TGP. The DS-9 is extremely open sounding, and very rounded. It's got that mellow, hollow drive that I lay awake at night pining for. It has thick bottom end, clear and open mids, and a very crisp and clear top that to me defines what makes an overdrive great. The whole point of an overdrive is to make your amp sound like it's on the edge of breakup, and the DS-9 really sounded like my amp on the verge of grit, without deafening me in the process. This pedal was so tube-like, that I decided to A/B it against a real tube overdrive. The DS-9 was utterly tubeless, and utterly glorious. While this unnamed tube pedal still sounded great in its own right, it just didn't have the same warm and clear character the DS-9 had. My favorite setting was on the SD mode; diming the level all the way, keeping the distortion a little over noon, the tone around 9 o'clock

and the cutoff between 9 and 10 o'clock. On the neck pickup of a Strat, these are the blues and fusion tones you dream of. I busted out Steely Dan and Jeff Beck numbers (in both SD and DS modes respectively), and the DS-9 completely nailed them. Slowing down with a bit of David Gilmour or Stevie Ray Vaughn, the DS-9 handled them with ease and beauty. This is an incredible overdrive, for those sick of Tube Screamers, but still wanting what makes them great.

WHAT WE LIKE

Warm, open, and hollow. Incredible tube-like tones. Versatile choice of distortion and overdrive. Incredible Price.

CONCERNS

Can still be a little boomy at lower Cutoff settings.