

KEELEY ELECTRONICS

STONE WORKSTATION

REVIEW BY **PHILLIP DODGE**

STREET PRICE **\$299.00**



Is that a pedalboard in your pocket or are you just happy to see me? Today, we're digging into the new Keeley Tone Workstation, an analog multi-effects pedal that combines four of Robert Keeley's classic circuits into a single small and affordable package. And all joking aside, the Tone Workstation really does put an entire pedalboard's worth of power into a single four by five-inch space and with a current draw of less than 50 milliamps.

The original Tone Workstations were built in a limited run ten years ago. John Mayer ended up with a few of those, and he took

them out on the road for the Dead & Company tour. This inspired Robert Keeley to re-design and re-release the Tone Workstation. The pedal can cover the majority of your "front-end" needs: compression, tone shaping, overdrive and distortion, and boost. It contains the Keeley Two Knob Compressor, the 1962 Overdrive, the Katana Boost, and the Red Dirt Overdrive. Purchased separately, those pedals would cost north of \$600. At \$299, the Tone Workstation is a no-brainer based on value alone.

The Tone Workstation is obviously an excellent

option for the guitarist that likes to just grab one pedal and keep it in the gig bag. But it's also perfect for adding a ton of functionality to a crowded board, and the top-mounted jacks make for even more space saving. I'll admit that I was afraid that three foot switches on a pedal this size would make for clumsy switching with my size 14 feet. Luckily, the switches are spaced perfectly so that you can engage each one without misfires and they even provide enough leeway at the edges for neighboring pedals.

Of course, size and convenience would be

worthless if the Tone Workstation didn't sound fantastic. Thankfully, it does. The first effect your guitar sees when you plug into the Tone Workstation is a slightly modified take on the Keeley Compressor with a Treble or Stock switch for offsetting the apparent treble loss that occurs in the circuit. More importantly for me, there is also a blend control. All of the way left is 100 percent compressed signal, and all the way right is a 50-50 blend of your unprocessed signal and the compressed signal. I loved the 50-50 blend for clean rhythm playing. It's also helpful for players with humbuckers or other high output pickups that can overwhelm the circuit.

Next up, there is a combination of Keeley's 1962 Overdrive and the Katana Boost. The 1962 is based on a Marshall Bluesbreaker with a Katana on either end. I reviewed the standalone 1962 back in September and found it to be a well-rounded low-to-mid gain overdrive. It's natural sounding and

responds well to playing dynamics and stacking. On the other hand, the Katana is just a beautiful, bone-simple JFET boost. It takes the tone, and just gives more of it. No harsh highs, no pushed mids—just a louder version of you.

Finally, there is the Red Dirt Overdrive. The Red Dirt takes Robert Keeley's years of modifying Tube Screemers and distills all that knowledge into a single pedal (in this case, a quadruple pedal). You get that classic mid-boosted grit that will make your leads stand out in the mix. And you get to select between the Baked Mod and the Mod+. The Mod+ is clearer and a little more open sounding, while the Baked Mod takes the Red Dirt into full-on distortion. The range of gain within the Red Dirt is nothing short of impressive. And even at the highest settings, the pedal remains low on noise and high on tone.

WHAT WE LIKE

The value for the price is exceptional, the size is small, and the tones are huge. We like everything about this pedal.

CONCERNS

I was initially dismayed at why the "amp in a box" tones of the 1962 and the boost of the Katana were placed before the Red Dirt. My instincts would be to run the Red Dirt into the 1962, and/or use the Katana to boost the volume of the tones created by the Red Dirt. But the way the Red Dirt tightens the base tone shows that Keeley knows what he's doing. Why did I question? The only concern will be for folks who might want to use the Red Dirt as their base tone, kicking on the 1962 or Katana is more of a dirt increase than a volume boost.