

PRODUCT REVIEW

Red Iron Amps' *Pedal Pusher*

by Steve Mercer

Guitarists looking for a little help making their solos stand out in the mix have a number of options these days. But what if you want something more than just a signal boost? What if you could have a pedal that adds warmth and dimension to your tone without losing clarity and also lets you easily push your tube amp into blissful, creamy overdrive growl?

Overview

Not just another booster pedal, the real valve *Pedal Pusher* stands out from the production germanium or IC pedals. These are hand-built preamp/buffer and DI units that boast point-to-point wiring and circuitry designed around vintage NOS (new old stock) subminiature pencil tubes. Pencil tubes were developed by Raytheon in the 1940s to meet stringent MIL-specs for reliability and for long life under extreme conditions. Who knew that they could be so musical?

In addition to offering reliability and tube warmth (even to solid state systems), the *Pedal Pusher* provides true bypass for uncolored feed-through. And it acts as a DI, complete with ground lift. Finally, designer/builder/artisan Paul Sanchez also added a three-way mini-toggle to easily shape your tone with three tone settings that he calls "full body, clean with compression, and bite."

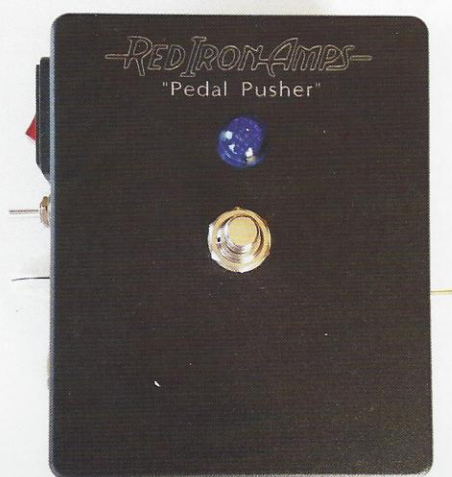
Features

- Hand built, point-to-point wiring
- Real tube organics at real-world voltages
- Preamp/buffer with true bypass
- Clean boost
- Adjustable (to +11dB) gain
- 3-way tonal switch
- Can be used as a DI
- Ground lift
- No wall wart
- Customization available

First Impressions

The first thing I noticed was the weight. While it won't hog a lot of pedal board real estate, it is a very solid unit. Its thick black steel case measures roughly 4 ½ by 3 ¾ inches, and is about 2 ½ inches high. The second thing that caught my eye was the power input. As noted above, there is no wall wart. Sanchez hates wall warts, so it sports a hefty AC cable and three-prong plug.

The controls are simple. One side has an on-



off rocker switch, the ground lift toggle, and a chicken head gain pot, which lets you dial in up to 11dB of boost. The opposite side of the box has the tone-shaping three-way mini toggle. Sitting on the top of the unit is simply the bypass toggle and a cool, retro-looking blue light that illuminates when the boost is on.

The Test Drive

More guitarists these days are discovering the joys of minimalism, leaving behind their arena amps and acre-sized pedal boards for a pedal or two to plug directly into the FOH. I decided to first test the *Pedal Pusher's* ability to warm up a solid state signal so I simply positioned the unit between my guitar and

the PA.

My first surprise was how quiet the signal was. It seemed to add no noise at all. And I was also pleased that the bypass switch at the top was silent as I switched back and forth.

Now I am kind of a tone snob, and I was dubious about the idea of getting any sort of tube warmth coming through the speakers of a solid state PA system. I was impressed. The difference was not subtle. I asked others to come over to hear me play while I switched the bypass on and off. Their comments included, "Wow, there is so much more definition" and "It adds dimension" as well as "I hear a much, much warmer tone."

Okay, so it functioned beautifully as a preamp and DI, warming up the signal while letting me fine tune the tone, but how well does it work in front of a real tube amp?

Paul advises that the *Pedal Pusher* should be the first in line in the signal chain, so I plugged it into the front of my pedal board. With all other pedals in bypass mode the *Pedal Pusher* made the already big sound of my hollow and semi-hollow Gibson guitars sound huge. And when I plugged in my Strat I got enhanced mids and low-end while its characteristic nasal tone and spank came right to the top. By digging in hard or easing off with the pick the response was very expressive and natural. The tone was superbly rich. When I switched on my tube overdrive pedal, which usually just fattens my sound, it sprang to life as a growling beast.

Overall Impression: Where can I get one?

I'll just say it is never leaving my pedal board. If you are looking for a way to transform your signal chain with real tube drive and tone (and who isn't?) or need a quiet, great-sounding and versatile preamp/DI to use in front of solid state components, the *Pedal Pusher* delivers. Priced at \$329, you may purchase it directly from Red Iron Amps at Redironamps.com.

Steve Mercer has been a guitar nut nearly all of his life. He lives in Tacoma, Washington with his wife, with whom he writes, plays, and sings post-industrial folk music.

