

finished so they felt smooth and fast. The sound of an Army/Navy mandolin is unique; though loud and with substantial sustain, it is not especially mellow or sweet. Compared to an

oval-hole carved-top Lebeda A-5, the Traveler sounds downright rude. If you're looking for a bluegrass instrument, the Traveler also may not work. Its chop is hollow and lacks the punch

you need for bluegrass. But for Celtic or folk-style, the Traveler's ability to be played loudly with ample sustain makes it very useful. Think Steve Earle on "Copperhead Road."

Although you can buy an Asian-made archtop or F-style mandolin for \$500, you'll be hard-pressed to find one as responsive or capable of putting out as much sound. — **Steven Stone**

Perfect Push? The Swell Pedal Company G-Drive

IN THIS DAY OF LARGE CORPORATIONS, there's still something to be said for "mom and pop" companies. Maybe it's the perceived attention to detail and the passion that comes from small businesses.

One such company is Swell, whose founder, Mike Olienechak, has been making effects pedals for discerning players such as Grammy winner Tom Hemby and guitar virtuoso John Jorgensen. Olienechak's G-TOD Tube Overdrive pedal is a standard among touring and recording guitarists.

Olienechak's Swell G-Drive is a Class-A high voltage tube drive pedal. It is *not* a high-gain overdrive, but instead is designed more to give a medium-drive/gain similar to the sound of a small '60s-style amp pushed to break-up.

The G-Drive's die-cast aluminum enclosure has an interlocking lid that helps provide RF shielding. Other construction features include Switchcraft jacks, JJ vacuum tubes, three-PDT true-bypass switching, phenolic knobs, ceramic tube sockets, and a powder-coated finish; our tester was a cool retro purple, others are available.

The all-analog G-Drive focuses on players who want warm tones with different overdrive options. There are separate Drive controls selectable via the footswitch, as well as a master Tone

and master Level. This allows players to access the high voltage drive of the 12AU7 so that they can have a subtle amp breakup on Drive 1 while having a raucous, blues overdrive on Drive 2. The options don't stop there. Swell has included not only a tuned amp output for traditional use, but a Record Out with built-in speaker simulation. This gives the option of two different sonic landscapes due to the tonal colors of each output.

Run between a Fender Telecaster and an early Fender Deluxe and with the unit's Drive 1 control set at 10 o'clock and Tone and Level at 12 o'clock, it was impressively quiet. Dead quiet, in fact. With the Tele in the bridge position, the G-Drive's warmth was apparent from the first note. Its overall sound was warm, with a subtle breakup reminiscent of a vintage tube amp pushed to inherent break-up — great for players who want to achieve that tone in low-volume situations. Pushing the Drive 1 Gain knob resulted in a nice array of breakup and even a nice bluesy overdrive when the knob was pegged. The natural low-end response was apparent with this setting as well when switched into the neck position.

The Drive 2 knob on the G-Drive gives a slightly higher gain than Drive 1. Players who dig overdrive will love the



SWELL G-DRIVE

Price: \$269

Contact: Swell Pedal Company,
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37204; phone (615) 469-1335;
www.swellpedals.com.

flexibility here. Switching to a guitar with humbuckers, Drive 2 offered a gritty, robust overdrive that would work great for rock, country, and blues. It responded very well to subtle tweaks in Gain, allowing for a variety of sounds. Adjusting the Tone while in Drive 2 showcased some of the pedal's sonic possibilities, especially in the way it interacts with the amp.

With a vintage hollowbody, the G-Drive's Record Out was tracked using both Drive positions on separate takes for rhythm and lead parts. The Record Out has a much different voice than the Amp Out

jack, being slightly more transparent and exhibiting a bit less midrange. Blending the Record Out on one track with a mic'd signal from the standard out running to an amplifier produced great overall roundness that recorded extremely well.

In all, the G-Drive impresses. If you get your kicks from the sound of a classic amp breaking up or are simply looking for a quality handcrafted pedal with the right amount of overdrive, it may be right up your alley. — **Sean O'Bryan Smith**

Nothing Fishy Here!

The Celmo Sardine Can Compression

CELMARENGEL'S SARDINE Can Compressor is an optical compressor that functions as a preamp line driver, compressor, overdrive, or (as Celmo refers to it as) a "rectifier" stage.

The Sardine Can's housing is aluminum cast to look like a sardine can... well, a sardine can with switches, knobs, and a protective "roll" bar! Its two chicken-head knobs adjust Compression and Output level, while



CELMO SARDINE CAN COMPRESSOR

Price: \$295

Contact: Kezako Productions, BP 12, Montcaret, 24230 France; www.celmo.com.