



## Line 6 M9

Line 6's new M9 Stompbox Modeler puts no fewer than 100 effects at your feet. Mike Hillier puts it through its paces.

### KEY FEATURES

- 3 FX at once
- 28-second looper
- 15 delay models
- 22 distortion/compression models
- 16 modulation models
- 16 filter models
- 11 reverb models

### M9 STOMPBOX MODELER

Manufacturer **Line 6**

Price **£379**

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Multi-effects units are often shunned by guitarists, especially those with large numbers of pedals, as they seem to enjoy the often complex patching arrangements that are possible with such setups. However, even among these difficult-to-please guitarists Line 6's modelling units have become very in-demand (particularly the green DL4, which puts a variety of hard-to-find vintage and boutique delay effects at your feet). So, with its 100 built-in effects – which includes many from the DL4 – can the new M9 attract the same kind of respect?

### Little box, big sound

Unlike the DL4 and its brethren the MM4, DM4 and FM4, the M9 doesn't simply focus on one school of effects, instead splitting its skills across the modelling of delay, modulation, distortion, filters and reverbs. It also incorporates a handy Looper tool. This makes for a particularly versatile unit

that's capable of twisting and contorting your guitar tone into myriad different sounds. Some of the names will arouse curiosity or mild bemusement, but you'll soon get the hang of them (a few examples: Weeper, Synth-O-Matic, Barber Pole Phaser, Spin Cycle and others).

Like Line 6's amps and the POD range, the M9 employs digital modelling technology to emulate the sounds of a variety of classic effects units. It has three effects engines,

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enabling you to use up to three effects at once. Each engine has two footswitches with a different effect saved to each one. You can therefore quickly switch between two different effects. Lights mounted above the switch give you visual feedback as to which of the two memories is currently active and what type of effect is loaded into each of the six slots – two for each of the three engines.

Distortion effects are distinguished by a yellow light, delays by green, modulations are blue, filters are purple

and reverbs are orange. This enables you to identify what is active at a glance without requiring you to squint at the LCD display – something that would be difficult to do when playing live.

For detailed editing, however, the LCD screen is essential and you'll have to get hands-on with the six small knobs, the first of which is used for selecting which effects model you want to use and doubles as a push-button encoder for switching between effects types. The remaining five knobs are used for controlling the various parameters of each effect. This is a little fiddly to do, but once you've configured the M9 you're unlikely to want to change the settings during a performance and you can always set two effects to different settings of the same model should you wish.

For live performance, the Scene mode enables you to store six different complete pedalboard settings. To access and use this you need to learn a few switch combinations, but the extra voices it brings to a live performance make it an essential aspect of the M9's overall versatility.

### Breaking up

In our experience, distortion effects are the hardest to get right in modelling units, and our own collection of boutique overdrive, fuzz and boost pedals has yet to be out-done by any multi-effects unit we've reviewed. To put it through its paces we used the M9 with a Gibson Les Paul and the clean setting on a Marshall JCM900 – a fairly typical guitarist's rig.

First impressions were very favourable. Some of our favourite pedals are modelled in this unit and we

were quickly able to bring up some great tearing lead sounds and chunky riff tones. What's more, many of the effects come with far more tonal options than the stompboxes that actually inspired them. Some of the original distortion boxes, for example, provide control over only two or three parameters, while the M9 provides five parameters, usually introducing EQ tone controls where they wouldn't otherwise be present. A/B'ing a few of the distortion effects against original analogue hardware from our collection

demonstrates just how close Line 6 has come to getting the M9 to sound like the originals, but at the same time, it also serves to highlight the limitations of some of the algorithms.

### M Power

For typical settings – and this obviously covers a wide range of very different musical scenarios – the M9 gives you pretty much everything you’ll want or need, but you can’t get quite the same dynamic response from it as you can from the original pedals, with harder notes tending to lack the bite generated by an analogue unit, a quality that many players actively exploit as an integral

part of their playing style. The tonal colour, on the other hand, is another story – it’s almost perfect.

However, crank up the Gain knob on the analogue hardware and the response from the amp changes massively as the signal starts to overdrive the inputs. Although we attempted the same thing with the M9, we couldn’t get our JCM900 to break up in quite the same way. On the other

### In the loop

Effects modelling isn’t the only trick the M9 has up its sleeve: you can also use the unit as a looper, and there’s up to 28

seconds of mono recording available. Using the Looper doesn’t prevent you from using effects, too, but if you want to change effects you will need to exit Looper mode since it re-assigns the switches to Looping functions. It’s easy to use and enables you to create complete arrangements with a single guitar. If you set the Looper to pre-effects, any FX will be applied only to the dry guitar signal; in post-effects mode

### MEASURING UP

The M9 squeezes a lot into a small package, but it’s up against some solid competition from the likes of Boss, Vox and DigiTech. Even Line 6’s own PODxt Live could be considered as an alternative for the M9. The PODxt Live also comes with amp modelling and a built-in expression pedal, although no looping technology is included.

the effects will be applied to both the dry guitar and the looped recording.

For guitarists on a tight budget, multi-effects boards can make a great deal of sense – building a unique FX collection takes time and money. And while the benefits are worth it in the end, a pre-built collection offered by a unit like the M9 can speed things up at the start. **MTM**

### METHOD SPOT

Two expression pedal inputs are included on the back for controlling parameters from effects in real time. This is essential if you want to use effects such as wah or the volume pedal, since the M9 doesn’t have an expression pedal. However, it is also incredibly useful for controlling parameters from other pedals in real time, providing a degree of control you can’t achieve with the analogue hardware. Set the expression to control delay time, for example, for some sci-fi swoops, or to the overdrive gain for a more unique volume control.

## FOR GUITARISTS ON A TIGHT BUDGET, MULTI-EFFECTS BOARDS CAN MAKE A GREAT DEAL OF SENSE.

### SUMMARY

#### WHY BUY

- Huge selection of sounds
- Incredibly easy to use
- Built-in Looper

#### WALK ON BY

- No built-in expression pedal
- No built-in amp modelling
- Limited to three simultaneous effects

### VERDICT

Line 6’s M9 couldn’t make getting great tones any easier – and with so many models to choose from, you have no excuse for not experimenting.





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