

Roger Mayer Vision Octavia

Britain's favourite effects guru is never content to rest on his laurels. Another classic design is reinvented and improved upon... by Adrian Clark

ROGER MAYER VISION OCTAVIA

ORIGIN: UK
TYPE: Octave/overdrive pedal
FEATURES: Choice of hard-wired or buffered outputs, convenient battery access
CONTROLS: Drive, Tone, Output
CONNECTIONS: Input, hardwired output, two buffered outputs
MIDI: No
POWER: Single nine-volt battery or adaptor (not supplied)
Roger Mayer
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The rivals

Vision Octavia
 Z-Vex Octane 3
 Line 6 Distortion Modeller
 Mayer Rocket Series Octavia
 Interestingly enough, the Line 6 includes the Tycobrahe Octavia in its list of modelled stompboxes – the Tycobrahe pedal was itself based on Roger's original design. The Z-Vex pedal is also very similar, in design as well as sound, but is obviously a lot more expensive. But Mayer's own rocket-shaped Octavia, a slightly simpler version without tone control, is still available and, like the Vision version, is very tidily-priced

Roger Mayer is no stranger to stompbox junkies. Although most people know him as the man who invented effects pedals for Jimi Hendrix, Roger has a long and impressive history in audio development and now produces a wide range of high-quality pedals in his south London workshop.

The Vision Octavia is the latest version of the Octavia effect, which was originally designed in 1967 and can clearly be heard on Jimi Hendrix tracks such as Who Knows and Purple Haze. It uses purely analogue circuitry to produce a doubling effect, pitched an octave higher than the original note, which is sensitive to your playing, your guitar settings and the effects which precede it. On the original incarnation, designed for Hendrix, the octave and drive sections were kept separate, but they are combined in the production versions. Although the previous rocket-shaped Octavia pedal is still available, the Vision Octavia has a number of new features.

The basic design is clean and minimalistic, and some thought has obviously gone into the ergonomics. The footswitch is situated a comfortable distance from the three control knobs and the four connections are hidden on the furthest side of the casing. The battery is housed on the nearside, under a clever sliding panel which both hides and secures the single nine-volt battery.

Looking more closely, the Vision Octavia has three outputs; in addition to the standard Hard Wire output there are two buffered outputs, designed to drive long cable lengths with no high frequency loss. There is also a tone control, something lacking on the rocket-shaped version.

SOUNDS: If you've only ever used the more common 'octave down' pedals, you'll probably be surprised by the nature, and range, of the available tones. We initially plugged the Octavia straight into a Cornford Harlequin and, even with this simple setup, there's plenty you can do. For a start, you can choose whether to get your overdrive from the pedal or the amp. Using a clean amp sound gives more of a ring modulator sound, with complex (and

Roger Mayer's Vision Octavia – extremely good value for money



potentially chaotic) overtones which can obscure the notes you play. Boosting the Octavia's Drive control results in a very saturated overdrive sound, once again with that wild ring mod sound.

Using the opposite approach (clean pedal, dirty amp) gives a tighter, more defined sound. Although the Octavia generally works best on single notes on the plain strings at high fretboard positions, this setting at least could feasibly be used to add spice to funky low-string riffs.

Introducing a fuzz pedal into the chain adds even more tonal possibilities. According to Roger, Jimi Hendrix used to place his fuzz and wah pedals before the Octavia in his signal chain, and this is definitely the key to getting that Purple Haze tone, with the clear upper octave doubling effect. The sound also loses a lot of bass, gaining a more pronounced mid-range bite. Reversing the order of the pedals gives

an even more biting upper octave effect, but the two notes seem to be more distinct. And whichever way you connect your fuzz pedal, you now have three gain stages to work with!

Verdict

Given that they are hand-built, Roger Mayer's pedals are always extremely good value for money – especially considering some of the rather silly prices in the 'boutique' pedal market of late. Usually there's a trade-off between price and sonic intrigue, but Roger's pedals offer plenty of unique sounds at a reasonable cost, and the Vision Octavia is no exception. It won't be suitable for everyone; if you use predominantly clean or heavily distorted sounds, you won't really be able to access the full tonal range. The best sounds seem to involve using a neck position single-coil pickup and at least a moderate amount of overdrive, from either the pedal, your amp or a fuzz pedal.

That said, if you fall anywhere within that middle range, you shouldn't have any problems. The sound has been fine-tuned in such a way that its 'tonal window' only seems to cover good, useable tones, and there's a very organic, human feel to what the pedal does. Keep 'em coming, Roger! **G**

ROGER MAYER VISION OCTAVIA TEST RESULTS

Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

WE LIKED Quiet operation, responsive to playing style and signal chain
WE DISLIKED Nothing objectively... it's all down to your personal taste

Roger Mayer Vision Octavia

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★