



Strymon El Capistan £279

Strymon's arrival continues with a practically sized tape echo that's emulated in fine detail *by Trevor Curwen*

The El Capistan aims to make the sound of a tape echo available in a stompbox by using Strymon's dTape technology which, says the company, "models all of the complexities of tape machines including such factors as wow and flutter, tape friction, bias adjustment, oscillation, saturation and delay-time-adjustment artefacts."

Three tape echoes are modelled – a three-way switch selects the types while a second three-way mode switch offers variations on each. Fixed represents a single head tape echo – and although it has three heads, these are selected individually by the second switch. Multi is a multi-head machine with the mode switch selecting one of three head combinations (1&2, 2&3, 1&3). Single is the moveable head machine and the mode switch calls up normal or double tape speeds plus a sound-on-sound mode that effectively gives you looping capability.

The usual mix, delay time and repeats knobs are complemented by knobs to adjust tape age (making the repeats darker) plus wow & flutter (modulation). If that's not enough, all five knobs have secondary functions (accessed by holding down the tap and bypass switches) including

adding spring reverb and adjusting tape bias, tape crinkle, low-end contour and the boost or cut amount.

Sounds

Alongside vintage Space Echo and Copicat units, this compares well: it sounds excellent and gets pretty close to real tape echo tone. There's a lot of sonic variation available, but we'd prefer dual-concentric knobs rather than holding down switches to access secondary functions.

The tonal range and character of the repeats is very adjustable so you can have fairly bright clean-ish repeats or use the knobs, particularly tape age, to dial in something much darker and mushier that melts naturally into your sound. Spring reverb adds the same sort of ambience as the short spring found in Space Echoes and, combined with the head selections in fixed and multi mode can put you in similar sonic territory. The single mode will appeal to Echoplex fans – its sound-on-sound facility is great fun with up to 20 seconds of lo-fi looping.

While we'd assume that users of the original machines would replace the tape and clean the heads on a regular basis, the El Capistan's parameters for recreating the sound of a tape echo that's not in peak condition do add an extra dimension by providing sonic artefacts that are interesting in their own right and contribute greatly to the pedal's ability to create a range of nicely atmospheric effects and ambient wash.

Strymon's 'favorite' switch, if added, will let you store a favourite sound to give onstage access to two different sounds at all times – the stored sound and the sound based on current knob positions. The 'favorite' switch socket can alternatively be used for an expression pedal to control any selectable knob parameter – increasing repeats would be a sensible choice here for runaway oscillation, but (like

its Brigadier sibling) holding down the tap switch creates the same cool effect.

Verdict

Electro-mechanical tape echo machines are bulky, can be expensive and can need a lot of TLC, so the El Capistan is a very welcome substitute. Emulating different types of tape echo, with parameter adjustment for all the nuances, it's as close as you can currently get to those sounds without a lot of hassle. But regardless of what it's supposed to be emulating, the El Capistan is simply an excellent delay pedal. **G**

The Bottom Line

We like: Accurate emulation; adjustable parameters; looping; tap tempo

We dislike: Secondary functions access

Guitarist says: A great all-round delay, perfect for any guitar and amp set-up

Strymon El Capistan

ORIGIN: USA

PRICE: £279

TYPE: Tape echo emulation pedal
CONNECTIONS: 1/4-inch jack input, 1/4-inch jack outputs (L and R), Exp pedal input

CONTROLS: Mix, time, tape age, repeats, wow & flutter, tape head switch (fixed, multi, single), mode switch (A, B, C), spring reverb, tape bias, tape crinkle, low-end contour, boost/cut

FOOTSWITCHES: Bypass, Tap tempo

POWER: 9V DC power from adaptor (not supplied)

DIMENSIONS: 4.5 (d) x 4 (w) x 1.75 (h) inches

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 0.44/0.96

OPTIONAL EXTRAS: 'Favorite' footswitch (£59), expression pedal

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Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



The Rivals

BOSS's RE-20 (£219) offers modelled Space Echo sounds, while **Akai's E2 Headrush** (£129) and **Wampler's Faux Tape Echo** (\$209) are also worth a try. The larger **Watkins Copicat Gold** (£975) is a digital version of the classic UK echo, and then there's the real thing: the **Fulltone Tube Tape Echo** (£999), which is based on an Echoplex, and the **Blue Coconut Unity Echoverb** (£899) six-head machine.