



# TREMOLLO PEDAL ROUND-UP

The effect that just won't go away: the guttural wobble of tremolo is just as valid today as it was in the 1960s. We consider six modern choices...

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**W**e've all heard tremolo guitar – it's all over surf music, 1960s soul, Spaghetti western and spy movie soundtracks and plenty of classic songs: The Rolling Stones' *Gimme Shelter*, Creedence Clearwater Revival's *Born On The Bayou*, The Smiths' *How Soon Is Now*, right up to its use by Radiohead and The Black Keys. So what's the history and the latest on this first electronically-created modulation effect for guitar, and what do you need to look for in a tremolo pedal?

Tremolo is a cyclical change in amplitude (volume) that manifests itself as a rhythmic pulsing. It first appeared in standalone form for guitar in the shape of the DeArmond Tremolo Control in the 40s, but the recorded tremolo sounds we're most familiar with came built into amps, and Fender popularised the effect most with the Tremolux in 1955 – although it's usually wrongly labelled as 'vibrato', which is actually pitch modulation.

Two basic methods for producing tremolo were seen in Fender amps: the

early amps varied the bias of valves while 'blackface' amps from around 1963 onwards used a photocell. Besides these two, usually referred to as bias and opto tremolo, there's a rarer-type of Fender tremolo as briefly seen in some of the company's brown Tolex amps from the early 60s. This is known as 'harmonic vibrato' created using dual-band filtering, and offering a sweet, phase-y trem.

## Synchronised Tremolo

The staple controls of tremolo are knobs to set the speed and the depth of the effect, and all tremolo pedals will have these, but while many modern pedals have the sole aim of recreating the vintage-amp tremolo sounds, many more have added new features to provide a wider range of sounds and functionality.

One of the most common facilities now provided is tap tempo for instant foot control over the speed, offering tremolo that's rhythmically synchronised to the music you're playing. Because of the nature of the tremolo effect, it can seem to make

your sound less prominent in a band mix when switched on. Consequently, many companies are now providing output volume knobs on their trem pedals so you can have unity gain, or a boost, when the effect kicks in.

At the root of tremolo is a particular geometric waveform used to modulate the amplitude and, while that's fixed in a tremolo-equipped amp, some pedals will offer a choice of waveforms (sine, triangle, square, and so on), crucial to shaping the sound: a square wave, for example, can give you an on/off sequenced effect. Some pedals also offer the ability to adjust the symmetry of the waveform, perhaps to make it slightly lopsided. One recent innovation – as seen in pedals by Pigtronix and Keeley – is dynamic control, whereby the speed or depth of the effect can be affected by how hard you play. Other pedals can offer instantly footswitchable tremolos at two different speeds.

Turn the page for our review round-up of six modern tremolo pedals.



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## 1 STRYMON FLINT £249

**ORIGIN:** USA

**TYPE:** Tremolo/reverb

**FEATURES:** True bypass, 3 reverb, 3 tremolo types

**CONTROLS:** Intensity, Mix, Speed, Decay, Colour, Tremolo type, Reverb type, Tremolo and Reverb Bypass footswitch

**CONNECTIONS:**

Standard input, standard outputs, expression pedal

**POWER:** Supplied 9V PSU

**DIMENSIONS:** 102 (w) x 114 (d) x 62mm (h)

**MusicPsych**

0207 607 6005

[www.strymon.net](http://www.strymon.net)



The **Flint** seems designed for habitual Fender amp users who are faced with the problem of having to use a hired/borrowed amp, and features both reverb and tremolo, individually footswitchable. While the reverb simulations cover spring, plate and hall sounds, it's the tremolos that we're interested in here, and all three Fender varieties are available: there's a '61 harmonic vibrato, '63 power tube bias tremolo and a '65 photocell tremolo. Intensity (depth) and speed adjustment knobs grace the front panel but there are also secondary functions like setting the pedal for a slight boost when it's kicked in and setting the order of the two effects.

Three trem flavours cover plenty of bases from the choppy '65 to the more rounded '63 and the delightful harmonic tremolo with its hint of rotary speaker or Uni-Vibe. **[TC]**

**VERDICT** Tremolo and reverb in one pedal is a great idea that is perfectly implemented here

9/10

## 2 SUHR JACK RABBIT £179

**ORIGIN:** USA

**TYPE:** Tremolo pedal

**FEATURES:** True or buffered bypass, selectable waveforms, tap tempo, strum tempo

**CONTROLS:** Depth, Rate, Level, Waveform switch, Tempo

Subdivision, FX Link, Bypass footswitch

**CONNECTIONS:**

Standard input, standard output, FX Link jack

**POWER:** 9V battery

or 9V adaptor

(not supplied)

**DIMENSIONS:** 67 (w) x 114 (d) x 50mm (h)

**Peach Guitars**

01376 553016

[www.suhr.com](http://www.suhr.com)

Despite its compact size, the Jack Rabbit packs plenty onboard. In addition to the standard rate and depth knobs, the output level knob can go from unity gain to supply 14dB of boost, which can really drive an amp into overdrive – turn down the trem depth to use it as a pure boost. The modulation waveform is also variable with Sine, Square, Triangle, Reverse Ramp and Ramp shapes for a range of sounds from rounded Fender-style throb through to harder-edged on/off stutters.

If you want to change speeds on the fly, two tempo modes with three subdivisions (quartet note, eighth note and quarter note triplet) are possible by holding down the footswitch for two seconds. There's normal Tap tempo and a Strum tempo mode where you set the tempo with three strums, and the option of control with a remote footswitch, too. **[TC]**

**VERDICT** With its compact size, many trem variations and a usable boost, this is a must-try pedal

8/10

## 3 KEELEY DYNATREM £135

**ORIGIN:** USA

**TYPE:** Tremolo pedal

**FEATURES:** True bypass, dynamic tremolo, selectable waveforms, reverb and tremolo combination

**CONTROLS:** Depth, Rate, Shape, Level, Mode switch

Bypass footswitch

**CONNECTIONS:**

Standard input,

standard output

**POWER:** 9V adaptor (not supplied)

**DIMENSIONS:** 66 (W) x 112 (D) x 50mm (H)

**Guitar Guitar**

0800 456 1959

[www.rkfx.com](http://www.rkfx.com)

The **DynaTrem** offers tremolo and reverb, although the reverb is only available in one of three modes, either with tremolo or by itself. The pedal's agenda is dynamic tremolo that responds to your playing: play harder and you can either get faster or deeper tremolo in the first two modes, the depth variation seeming the more natural of the two when playing. The third mode offers 'Harmonic Tremolo + Reverb' for that phase-y tremolo with a hint of pitch shift combined with a spacey ambience.

There's usefully adjustable output level and, while the depth and rate knobs do their normal job for mode three, they also feature an element of setting how the parameters react to playing dynamics in modes one and two. A Shape knob offers four different waveforms for the first two modes and adds the reverb for the third. **[TC]**

**VERDICT** An interesting sonic signature makes this a great choice if you want something different

8/10

## 4 SEYMOUR DUNCAN SHAPESHIFTER £249

**ORIGIN:** USA

**TYPE:** Tremolo pedal

**FEATURES:** Electrical true bypass, variable waveforms, tap tempo

**CONTROLS:** Wave, Depth, Shape, Speed, Ch Phase, Mode switch, Bypass footswitch, Tap Tempo footswitch

**CONNECTIONS:**

Standard inputs

L (Mono) & R, standard outputs L & R

**POWER:** 9V battery or 9V-18V adaptor (not supplied)

**DIMENSIONS:** 90 (W) x 125 (D) x 55mm (H)

**Rosetti**

01376 550033

[seymourduncan.com](http://seymourduncan.com)

This is a recently launched revamped version of the original that adds stereo operation and a channel phase knob that can adjust the phase between left and right output channels from 0 to 180 degrees, which results in some interesting sonic variations.

The shape of the tremolo waveform here is continuously variable from sine wave through triangle to square wave, and you can also tweak the shape, so there's load of variations – from familiar vintage tones to extreme helicopter chops. While the depth knob works as you'd expect, you can adjust the speed in three ways – either conventionally with the knob or via the tap tempo footswitch, either as tapped or by engaging the ratio switch to dial in speeds up to four times faster than your quickest tap. The sound sits well when engaged, but there's no apparent boost and no volume adjustment. **[TC]**

**VERDICT** With a massive feature set, you can conjure up a wide range of tremolo sounds with this pedal

7/10

5



## 5 WAMPLER LATITUDE STANDARD £159

**ORIGIN:** USA

**TYPE:** Tremolo pedal

**FEATURES:**

True bypass

**CONTROLS:** Speed, Depth, Level, Bypass footswitch

**CONNECTIONS:**

Standard input, standard output

**POWER:** 9V adaptor (not supplied)

**DIMENSIONS:** 63 (W) x 114 (D) x 57mm (H)

**First Line Distribution**  
01626 853876  
wamplerpedals.com

**Wampler's Latitude** Deluxe (£217), released last year, is a fully featured tremolo that includes tap tempo with four subdivisions, a choice of three waveforms, and adjustable Attack and Space for fine tuning of the wave shape. That's a pretty comprehensive feature set, but if you are looking for something less complex, the newly minted Latitude Standard takes the Fender-inspired portion of the sound from the Deluxe and puts it in a more compact pedalboard-friendly form. There's a no-brainer user interface that gives you access to standard depth and speed controls and a variable output that offers a slight boost to ensure your sound's prominence in the mix. A pulsing red LED always show the tremolo speed, even in bypass, while a bright blue LED lets you know the effect is active.

Sound-wise, it's Fender-style tremolo all the way with a rounded sine wave instead of a choppy character, so it's a pedal for traditionalists rather than experimentalists who would be better to check out the Deluxe. **[TC]**

**VERDICT** Easy-to-use amp-style tremolo with adjustable output – a practical pedalboard option

7/10

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## 6 CARL MARTIN SURF TREM £89

**ORIGIN:** China

**TYPE:** Tremolo pedal

**FEATURES:**

Semi-true bypass

**CONTROLS:** Depth, Speed, Bypass footswitch

**CONNECTIONS:**

Standard input, standard output

**POWER:** 9V battery or 9V adaptor (not supplied)

**DIMENSIONS:** 120 (W) x 95 (D) x 56mm (H)

**First Line Distribution**  
01626 853876  
www.carlmartin.com

**Certainly the** coolest looking of the pedals collected in this round-up with its surf green chassis and cream chickenhead knobs, the Surf Trem is also the most basic of the pedals on test with just amp-style depth and speed control.

Now, while the Surf Trem – which is part of Denmark-based Carl Martin's Vintage Series – has been around for a few years in a couple of different-shaped enclosures, this particular unit is a newly released revision of the pedal that, alongside the standard red LED on/off indicator, adds a second bright blue LED that pulses in time with the speed of the tremolo, whether bypassed or not, leaving you in no doubt as to the trem speed.

The circuitry of the pedal is taken from the company's TremO'vibe tremolo and vibrato pedal, and offers a rich, warm and rounded tremolo. The sound is reminiscent of Fender-style bias tremolo, and while there's no volume knob, when the effect is kicked in there's no loss of level, instead a distinct boost to give the sound presence. **[TC]**

**VERDICT** If you're looking for vintage-amp tremolo, simply delivered, this could be your pedal

7/10