

Pocket Rocket

The Helix family expands with its smallest member yet – a true stompbox that will easily fit on your pedalboard

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LINE 6 HX STOMP £558

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What You Need To Know

1 What's this? Didn't Line 6 recently introduce a HX Effects?

Yes, but it only had the Helix effects. This unit has those, plus all of Helix's amp and cab sims and IR loading.

2 So, it's more of an all-rounder then?

We reckon so. You could use it with an amp and other pedals, but it could also be your total rig.

3 Basically, it's a Helix in a stompbox?

Well, yes and no. Line 6 says that it sounds identical to the full blown Helix, but, obviously, the switching facilities are a lot more limited with just three footswitches, plus each preset has a maximum of only six blocks, rather than eight.

The pedal has been set up to get full flexibility from the three footswitches

1. The display is divided: the Home/View and Action buttons generally relate to the top half; the two Page buttons and knob to the bottom

2. Connect the HX Stomp to a computer via USB and you'll get access to the HX Edit software, which makes easy work of all editing

Line 6's Helix range continues to expand at quite an alarming rate. It's not been very long since we saw the HX Effects, which put all of the Helix effects (although none of its amp simulations) into one large-format pedal for use with an amp, either as a self-contained compact pedalboard or a constituent part of a bigger 'board.

Now, for exactly the same price, we have the HX Stomp, which includes both the amp sims *and* effects, but puts them into a pedalboard-ready box that's about the same size as a Strymon Big Sky or similar. While there's no pedal treadle and just three footswitches, what you are getting here, as Line 6 is at pains to point out, is something that sounds identical to the Helix: it has the same 24-bit/192kHz converters, analogue impedance circuits, guitar inputs with 123dB of dynamic range, and is also stuffed with all the same effects, amps, cabs and IR loading. The difference is that those are arranged here in just six blocks, as opposed to its big brother's eight, so some of the more complex combinations aren't going to be available. However, Line 6 says that the six-block limit keeps the interface navigation elegantly simple and optimises the system so you don't easily run out of DSP. Word is that there may be more DSP-hungry models coming down the road, notably polyphonic pitch-shifting and more complex amps.

In Use

The size of this HX Stomp means that it will easily slip onto a pedalboard, but it does need a hefty dose of current, so you'll also be slipping its own DC-3g nine-volt power supply on there with it, unless you have

something heavy-duty like the Voodoo Lab Pedal Power 4x4 where you can double up outputs to supply the necessary ampage.

The main inputs and outputs (various mono and stereo combinations are possible) are conveniently on the back panel, as is the expression pedal/footswitch jack, which has options for connecting up to two devices. Send and return connections for bringing external pedals into the HX Stomp signal chain, or for a four-cable method hook-up, are on the right-hand side panel.

The unit has full MIDI capability with related socketry on the left-hand side next to a stereo headphone jack – great for silent practice or setting up your presets away from your amp. A USB connection allows use of the pedal as an audio/MIDI interface for computer recording and also provides access to the excellent HX Edit software as an alternative to hands on the front panel.

Hands-on ain't too bad at all, though, with a user interface that keeps things really simple, the main action being carried out with three press/turn soft knobs that relate to parameters directly above them in the very clear display. Building patches and changing parameters is straightforward and, like other Helix family members, you can just brush the footswitches to access certain parameters.

Compared to one of the large Helix floorboards, three footswitches might not seem a lot for live work, but the pedal has been set up to get full flexibility out of them with four different working modes instantly available. These allow switching of single or multiple blocks (Stomp mode), switching of presets (Preset mode) and switching of Snapshots (Snapshot mode). Each preset can store three related Snapshots, basically

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3. The three soft knobs are assigned to functions and values in the screen above, and have both push and turn actions

4. You can connect a single expression pedal or footswitch to the EXP 1/2, FS 4/5 socket, but you can have two if you use a Y-cable. The socket is set for a Mission SP1-L6H Line 6 Expression Pedal, with a toe switch that toggles between EXP 1 (Wah/Pitch Wham) and EXP 2 (Volume/Pan)

5. Ins and outs can be used as an effects loop for inserting external stompboxes between specific blocks



presets within a preset that can have altered parameters, a different number of active blocks or a combination of both. The fourth mode, Scroll, lets you use the first two footswitches to scroll up and down through the presets, instantly loading them, or alternatively lets you do the same for the three snapshots in a preset.

With time put in preparing the content and order of presets ready for use, there's likely enough there to ensure you can call up the sounds you need when you want them. But if you want more options you can add two assignable external footswitches. A possible pedalboard use might then be to have a different block assigned to each of five footswitches in Stomp mode. There's also the possibility of MIDI control, as any block or parameter can be assigned to an incoming CC message.

In terms of sound, it's Helix all the way with really authentic amp models to suit

considerable and varied musical genres and just about all the effects you'd need – and then some. Six blocks doesn't feel like we're being short-changed because there's loads you can do with those and split/parallel signal paths, whether it's a full signal chain with, say, compressor, drive, amp/cab, modulation, delay and reverb, or just a string of effects.

Whether you want to recreate some classic rigs such as a Rangemaster in front of an AC30, or get all spacey by feeding the Cosmos Echo into the Ganymede reverb, there's little here that will disappoint.

Verdict

When Line 6's first bean-shaped POD appeared it was something of a revelation, bringing amp and effects modelling to the masses in an affordable hardware unit. In many ways, this is the Helix range's modern equivalent. Its greatest appeal may lie in offering access to a set of Helix amp and effects sounds at a much lower price point than previously (it's street price is around £465), but it's also that there are so many ways to use the HX Stomp.

Like a POD, it can be a practical table-top facility for recording and practice, while for live work it could suit the hardcore Helix users who want a backup for their main rig or a compact hand-luggage version for gigs they have to fly to. There may be many users, however, who are happy to have the amp sims but really want the HX Stomp for its effects – while it is quite capable of being the sole effects unit on stage, it is most likely to find a role slotted into a pedalboard, immensely expanding the sonic possibilities. **G**



LINE 6 HX STOMP

PRICE: £558

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Multi-effects pedal with amp/cabs and effects

FEATURES: Selectable buffered or true bypass, 126 preset locations (42 banks of 3), 8in/8out audio interface, looper, MIDI

MODELS: Over 300 effects and models from Helix, M-Series, and legacy Line 6 products

CONTROLS: Volume, 5x soft knobs, 4x buttons, 3x footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard inputs (L/Mono, R), standard outputs (L/Mono, R), Stereo Send, Return/Aux In L/Mono and R, Exp pedal, MIDI In, MIDI Out/Thru, standard stereo headphone output, USB

POWER: Supplied 9V DC DC-3G adaptor 3000 mA

DIMENSIONS: 170 (w) x 120 (d) x 60mm (h)

THE RIVALS

If the small size doesn't do it for you and you have the cash, you might wish to look at the full-size Helix models: the top-of-the range Line 6 Helix Floor (£1,632) and the Helix LT (£1,117). For an alternative small amp modeller with effects at around the same price, there's the six-footswitch Atomic AmpliFire 6 (£529). If you just want a box full of high-quality effects as an add-on to your rig, the Eventide H9 Max (£565) ticks a lot of boxes, with access to all the algorithms from Eventide's existing pedals plus any to be released in future.



9/10

PROS Helix sounds at a more affordable price; compact size; flexible use of footswitches; practical connectivity options; comprehensive audio interface functionality; MIDI control

CONS Needs high current; the supplied adaptor is not the most ergonomic we've seen for pedalboard mounting