



Wolfram Martin Simpson Signature Slide

www.wolframslides.com £250

"£250 for a bit of metal tube – they're taking the piss," was the general reaction when I first pointed other players at this rather astounding thing.

But they hadn't tried it. I first encountered one earlier this year when Martin Simpson passed through the *fRoots* Dungeon with the prototype, and five minutes with it left my flabber completely and comprehensively gashed. It improves tone and sustain beyond anything you'd have thought possible.

My very first slide, the night I came home from first seeing Mississippi Fred McDowell, was a couple of inches liberated with a hacksaw from my landlord's brass curtain rail. Then I did the obligatory bash and rattle with the authentic neck carefully removed from a wine bottle before a biker friend donated a length of his handlebars during an emergency. A shop bought solid brass one later served me well through the 1970s (with a nightly post-gig application of Brasso) until I discovered my trusty red stove-enamelled one – young Simpson was also wielding one in a fetching cream at the time – that I've used ever since. So I know a thing or two about slides.

This is beyond the Rolls Royce of acoustic guitar slides. Made from nickel tungsten carbide, it's heavier than lead, almost twice as heavy as steel and as hard as sapphire. Each one has to be laboriously precision ground from very expensive blanks with diamond tooling, and hand polished with diamond paste. The inner bore is tapered, so that the wall is thicker and carries more mass at finger tip end, and the ends radiused. It's very heavy, very beautiful, and will change your life.

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The result needs a fairly short period of getting used to. It nearly plays itself, allowing the finger inside to relax rather than grip. The considerable mass means that you need little pressure, especially on the top strings, to produce exquisite tone and remarkable sustain. Indeed you have to learn to take the pressure off, because otherwise you'll initially be getting clonks from fret ends. First thought is that you might need to raise the action to reduce that, but after a few minutes you find your technique adapting. And your guitar sounding like a new instrument. And your wallet opening and saying "take me".

£250 for something which will make such a major improvement to your sound and technique? A professional guitar player wouldn't think twice about spending that on installing a better internal pick up and, as Martin himself points out, have you seen what violin bows can cost?

Ian Anderson

Headway EDB-2 & EDM-1 Guitar Preamps

Headway Music Audio £249.95 and £149.95.

Headway have been making popular pickups for guitars and acoustic instruments since the '90s. Becoming Headway Music Audio in 2006 under the leadership of original partner John Littler, they have expanded into preamps and acoustic amplifiers designed and built in the UK in recent years.

The EDB-2 is the new flagship preamp in Headway's range. It manages to squeeze a lot into a small-ish package – like the smaller EDM-1 the box includes a belt clip for the unit but I can't imagine anyone wanting to use it. It features two channels, including 9v phantom power for active pickups on channel 1 and 18v phantom power for condenser mics on channel 2. Each channel has an input impedance selector (giving an input impedance of 20, 5 or 1 megaohms – vital for passive piezo pickups) and either channel can be sent to the five-band Baxandall EQ. The front panel of the unit also has a three-way switch for the high pass filter frequency, an earth lift for the rear-mounted XLR output, a mute switch, and a notch filter for feedback suppression. The side panel has a blended line out jack, which would be useful as a

Headway EDB-2 Preamp.



tuner output, and an aux/iPod in socket on 3.5 mm mini-jack (someone must find that useful...). The unit has a thread in the base for attaching a mic stand bracket if you want the controls within easy reach à la Martin Carthy or Steve Knightley.

The more compact EDM-1 also features a mic stand thread, but this time in a much smaller box. It has only one channel, a three-band EQ, and a balanced out on TRS jack with an XLR adaptor supplied in the box. The feedback filter in this case consists of a single dial with eleven settings from 'bass' to the fear-inducing 'rock acoustic'. It shares the 20/5/1 megaohm impedance settings of its larger brother, and can also supply 9v phantom power if required.

After a few minutes of use I found that both preamps almost caused me to forget that they were there – possibly the highest compliment that you could pay them sonically. The EQ on both units is very musical with sensibly chosen frequency ranges, although thanks to the high input impedance very little EQ was needed. I didn't have any need for the feedback filter in the EDB-2 but in the name of research I tried to push my guitar towards howling anyway. I found the notch filter easy to use and it will undoubtedly be of use to those playing noisier venues.

My only slight reservation is that both preamps run from an 18v power supply and won't run from 48v phantom power at all, limiting those who wish to mount the preamp on a pedal board powered by a common power supply (as I do) and meaning that if you damage or lose the supplied 'wall wart' then it's batteries only until you buy a specific replacement. I understand why this was done though – it gives extra headroom and audio performance – and in the end I did successfully run the preamp using a Diego voltage multiplier attachment.

Both preamps are built to last, can deliver more than enough gain to boost weak pickups, and can tweak the EQ to make pretty much any source sound good. Whether you need all the functions of the EDB-2 or just need the basics of the EDM-1, the units simply work and are very reasonably priced considering the build and audio quality. They allow you forget about sound problems and get on with playing, and you can't wish for better than that.

www.headwaymusicaudio.com

Jim Moray