

[SPECIALS] Digging into the history of the legendary pedal that left its mark on the pedal industry

Xotic Effects RC-Booster 20th Anniversary

In the early 2000s, during the dawn of boutique effects pedals, a legendary model slowly climbed its way up to become a staple in the industry. Even after 20 years since its release, the charm of the "RC-Booster" has not faded. Let's take a closer look at the development and evolution of this iconic pedal!

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On its 20th anniversary, let's take a look back at the history of the "RC-Booster."

"The significance of producing and maintaining a lineup that is not bound by trends, not just in effects pedals, is incredibly important. Xotic Effects, which continues to make strides as a core member of the boutique movement on the US West Coast, celebrated the 20th anniversary of one of their origins, the "RC-Booster," in 2022. The transparent sound that was born in an era when the concept of a "clean booster" was not yet commonplace has become an "indispensable" presence for musicians around the world. In response to the release of a new commemorative model that carries the name "RC" with a theme of returning to its origins, we would like to look back on the historical background of the unwavering long-seller "RC-Booster" and the evolution of its sound together with its developer, Kiyoshi Sasaki.

"It's fun to create a sound that doesn't sound like you're using a pedal"

—It's really amazing that the "RC-Booster"

has been selling for 20 years! I'm glad that all types, including the current "RC-Booster V2," have the same ease of use.

Kiyoshi Sasaki "KS": It's like the Apple products over the years (laughs). Even if you pick up the new "RC-Booster," it's reassuring to know that "the way you've been using it is there." I think it's better for people who have been using it for a long time. It also fits in well with designs that are similar to the "AC-Booster" and "BB-Preamp." From the beginning of the brand, we have always been conscious of making all Xotic products user-friendly without having to learn everything from scratch.

---"The "AC-Booster" and "RC-Booster" were the first distortion pedals for Xotic, weren't they? KS: That's right. From the time I started making effects pedals, I thought it would be interesting to create a sound that didn't sound like you were using a pedal. Not a dramatic effect, but a pedal that makes the guitar sound really

"The model name does not stand for 'Real Clean,' but rather means 'Rig Conductor.'"

good just by passing through it. That's how the "AC-Booster" and "RC-Booster" were created. However, to tell you the truth, I originally wanted to make the "AC" version, and the "RC" version was a byproduct (laughs). Because of this, there were some aspects of the "RC-Booster" that I myself didn't really see at first. So, I didn't feel so sure about the product at first. But I heard that many musicians were using it, and my thinking gradually changed.

—Who was using it at the time?

KS: I think John Fogerty was one of the first to use it. He received it from studio personnel, and he still seems to be using one of the earliest models today. Dean Parks also said he really liked it and I went to meet him. He also uses it for acoustic guitar. Jay Graydon and Paul Jackson Jr. also gave it high praise. Also, around 2003, I think. Brad Paisley, who was still unknown at the time, said that he really liked it

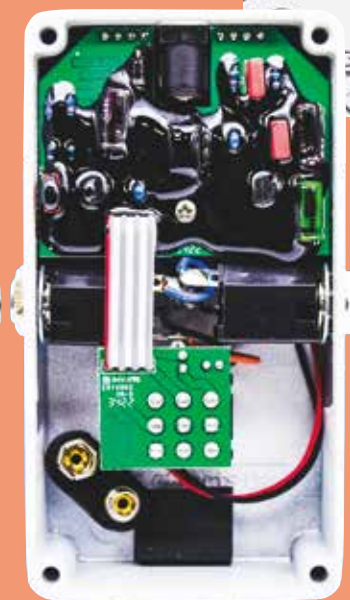
The 20th anniversary "RC-Booster" is tuned with the sound in mind of the "Initial Version"

RC-Booster Classic [20th Anniversary Model]

[Specifications]●Controls: Gain, Treble, Volume, Bass ●Switches: On/Off●Terminals: Input, Output
●Dimensions: 60mm(W), 110mm(D), 50mm(H) ●Battery: 006P(9V)/9VDC ●Price: ¥25,300 [1,000 piece limited run]

●The 20th anniversary special RC-Booster was just released with a white powder-coated look that is familiar to longtime fans. While it is positioned as a reproduction model with a "return to the roots" concept, the circuit has been completely reexamined with modern components and the power supply can now handle 18V, making it a much more versatile model than the initial version 1. In other words, it is now the newest and most nostalgic "RC-Booster". The first 1,000 units will be sold as a luxurious special edition bundle with various perks such as the "Classic Limited Edition" (photo 2), and later on, the regular version of the body alone will continue to be sold at the same price.

② Classic Limited Edition



① Bypass Switch



□Similar to the "V2" model, the foot-switch uses a direct board mount. The LED indicator has been returned to the top of the switch according to the old specifications. However, the color of the LED is blue.



"As a model made to commemorate the 20th anniversary since its release, I compared it not only to the initial model but also to other units from different periods. Although I thought they didn't aim for a complete reproduction of the initial type, rather they tried to recreate its unique mellow tone while keeping the thickness in the bass that was added after the

4 "The contents of the special box for the "Classic Limited" edition include 11 picks from musicians associated with the brand, as well as a lanyard strap, pouch, and silicone band.

Scott Henderson model. I feel that it has its own individuality. It returns to its roots while being more lively than the initial unit and has the super-low sound that supports the bottom after the Scott Henderson model. Therefore, it can be said that it is a model that collects the best parts of all versions of the "RC-Booster". Compared to the "V2", it has a mellow atmosphere, so it may be the perfect model for modern music like neo-soul."

Daisuke Kokuda, a renowned guitarist, analyzes the lineage of the "RC" series! "



[Profile] Born in Sapporo, Hokkaido. After graduating from Berklee College of Music, he gained popularity in the jazz industry by receiving the special judge's award at the Gibson Jazz Guitar Contest 2005 and becoming a top seller on the world's No.1 jazz fusion website. In recent years, he has participated as a guitarist in recording for games and anime music that represent Japan, such as "Super Smash Bros. SPECIAL" and "Ghost in the Shell: SAC_2045". In this article, we asked Kunida, who has been using "RC-Booster" and has tried various variations over the years, to comment on the 20-year history of the "RC-Booster". Kunida has also uploaded demo performances of "RC-Booster Classic" on the Effect Book YouTube channel (QR code on the right), so please check it out.



and wanted to use it, so we sent one to him. I was also really happy to see my favorite Doyle Bramhall II placing an "RC" at his feet during Eric Clapton's tour in 2004.

—They are all amazing musicians.

KS: Among them, I was particularly impressed with how Allen Hinds used the "RC-Booster." At the time when we started selling the pedal,

the idea of layering pedals was just starting to gain popularity, but I still thought that boosters should be placed before distortions. However, I was bothered by how much the sound was compressed when I placed the "RC" in front of the chain through Fender Blackface amps. At that time, Allen cascaded three gain pedals in the order of "Fulltone OCD" - "AC-Booster" -

"RC-Booster." Seeing that, I realized that "RC" might be better suited as a booster for the later stage. I felt like a new door had opened, and that was when I first thought, "RC might work...!"

—I think that professional use on stage exceeded the designer's expectations. Was it possible because the "RC-Booster" was a highly adaptable pedal that had not existed before?

KS: I think that's partly true. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, there were overwhelmingly more people using Tube Screamer (TS) pedals as boosters. But TS is always TS... it's easy to play for anyone, but it only produces that specific sound. However, at that time, there were only a few clean boosters available, such as MXR's "Micro Amp," Z.Vex's "Super Hard-On," and Keyley's "Katana Boost" did not exist yet. Fulltone's "Full-Drive 2" with comp-cut specifications and Klon's "Centaur" also had simple EQs and didn't have much flexibility. In such a situation, I think that the personality of the "RC-Booster," which had two-band EQ and could add "correction," gave a lot of freedom in how it was used. After all, the name "RC" comes from "Rig Conductor."

—Huh? Wasn't it short for "Real Clean"?

KS: Actually, it's different (laughs). "Conductor"

The earliest version with a nickname "Engraved Serial" ① Early 2000's RC-Booster [serial number : 0820]



"I've tried various 'RC-Boosters' before, but this one with the engraved serial is the first time. Compared to the Scott model and later models, it has weaker highs and gain, and gives the impression of a pure clean booster. The biggest difference is that the pushing of the low range is suppressed, and the overall tone feels darker. As a result, it feels weaker in power, so that may be a factor in making it sound vintage. Although

the early models have the low range suppressed, it is not to the extent of being a disadvantage, so I think it's good to choose based on the player's preference and style. There is no other mellowness when playing single notes, so depending on the person, they may feel that this period's unit is the easiest to play."



① Inside View

[RC-Booster Ser.#0820 Overview]

● The "RC-Booster" with the cute Comic Sans font is the earliest version, with a 16mm pot installed and a gray epoxy substrate carefully potted with J-B Weld, which was only seen at this time. The exterior design was done by the designer, Mr. Sasaki himself, and when deciding on the color of the case, he chose "white" because it had a cleaner sound than the "AC-Booster" (yellow), which had an overdrive image. Although it is about 20 years old, it has a universal appeal that does not fade in looks or sound.

② Serial Number



③ Bypass Switch & Indicator



④ The so-called "engraved model," where the serial number is directly engraved on the case, is a specification only found in the earliest "AC-Boosters" and "RC-Boosters," with only about 1,000 units of each existing. A Fujisoku-made 9-pin switch is adopted for the true bypass.

[The equipment provided by] Yasushi Imai

means "musical conductor." But the customers started saying, "Isn't it short for 'Real Clean'?" Well, that was more interesting, so we just went with it (laughs).

Due to the RoHS directive, we reviewed almost all components of the "RC-Booster" model.

—When was this model released exactly?

KS: According to our records, it has been on sale since December 2002. However, it may have been circulating in the United States a little earlier.

—Considering that it has been in circulation for a long time, I would think the specifications have also evolved. Has the sound gradually changed over time?

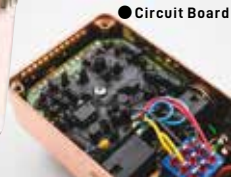
KS: Although we intentionally changed some parts, when you continue to produce a product for a long time, there are also supply problems with the parts themselves, so they change gradually. Nevertheless, I don't think it has changed much until about the first serial number of 5,000. There was a period when we changed the circuit board and the case one after another when we changed the pot to a sealed type around 2005 or 2006, and at that time, the LED indicator was also moved to the

Limited production models with color variations

RC-Booster Copper



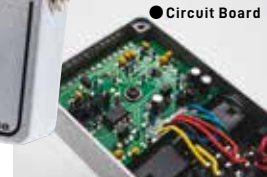
● In 2007, about 300 units were produced as a paint test due to the adoption of their own case. The contents are compliant with RoHS directives. The copper model that was on a Scott's pedal board until 2014 was a modified version of this.



RC-Booster Silver Glitter



● In 2010, a limited version with a Sparkle Silver coating was released. It is one of the few colored lines released after the general model was switched to the Scott's specification.



top. The case and paint also have unexpected effects on the sound. In 2007 we switched to our own cases and since then there may have been slight variations in the sound due to the limited version's paint color such as copper, chrome, and blue. However, regarding the sound quality, I think the biggest impact was from the RoHS directive implemented in 2006.

In order to comply with it, we had to review almost all of the components.

—Did you have to change everything? That must have been tough...

KS: We were able to cope with the op-amp without changing the type, but all of TDK's capacitors were unusable. The solder was particularly troublesome. We could only use

An early edition with the so-called "Initial Version"

② Early 2000's RC-Booster [serial number : 4102]



those who feel the humbucker pickups lack clarity, raising the "TREBLE" control can improve the sound, and for those who find the range of the

"After the first 1,000 units, the serial numbers are handwritten instead of engraved, but there's almost no difference in sound between this period and the engraved serial number version. Whichever the LED indicator is located at the bottom, the basic tone is the same. For

single coil pickups too wide, lowering the "BASS" control can help. The EQ settings can be adjusted for any guitar, and this is a common feature. By the way, units with engraved serial numbers or from this period are said to lose some of their sound quality when the foot switch is engaged, but the bypass sound is not affected much. When compared, there's almost no difference in sound, and both are good, but if given a choice, it's better to have the engraved serial number version, as it's rarer (laughs)."



① Inside View

[RC-Booster Ser.#4102 Overview]

● The 2005-era "RC-Booster" has the most standard specifications before the RoHS complied versions. The switch, made by Fujisoku, is replaced with a 3PDT switch from CIC around serial number 5,000. Therefore, this version is right before the transitional period. The case still uses Hammond parts, but later versions of the "RC-Booster" would use the same enclosure as the Electro Harmonix and Z.Vex products, and the sound would change slightly. The true essence of the early version can be felt up until this serial number range.

② Serial Number



③ Circuit Board



④ The serial numbers during this period are handwritten with a magic marker on the upper part of the back cover, so they often wear off with use. Also, note that the parts are fixed with a black rubber coating called "Plasti-Dip," which is softer than the previous material.

The second gen. "SH" model that spurred the evolution of the "RC"



RC-Booster SH Copper

- In response to Scott Henderson's request to be able to set two different gain levels for the same song, the new "RC-Booster SH" was created with a two-foot switch configuration, the first of its kind. They are not two separate distortion channels; it's more like two knobs on the same gain control stacking each other. When both gain controllers are active, only the gain width is simply added together without changing distortion. The basic sound is the same as the Scott Henderson version from 2008 onwards.

lead-free solder, so we had to use boards that were compatible with it. The increased silver content in the solder should make the sound much cleaner than before. Well, it's not just because of that, but in 2008, the regular model was unified to the Scott Henderson specification, so the sound of the "RC" definitely

changed significantly around that time.

—In 2008, there was also a limited edition blue model for Japan. Was that also the Scott Henderson specification?

KS:I think the blue was the last limited version of the old specification. Strictly speaking, the regular model is the new specification (Scott

Henderson specification) from serial number 12,061 onwards. The case has also changed several times since then, and we started using a thicker case with the "RC-Booster V2", and also changed the paint. I don't remember exactly when, but even without the RoHS directive, I think the transistor at the input emitter follower became discontinued halfway through, and the sound changed a little there. However, what I have always valued even as the parts have evolved in various ways is actually "durability". Sound is of course important, but as long as it is an instrument, trouble must be avoided at all costs.

—Indeed, this rugged construction is also a characteristic of the Xotic pedals.

KS:Some boutique pedals are made in such a way that parts easily come out. I didn't want to make products with that kind of specification. Having made the "RC-Booster" for 20 years, we have had repairs for the switch, LED indicator, and knobs cracking, but I am proud to say that there have been almost no reports of damage to the circuit inside.

The significant influence of Scott Henderson on the "RC-Booster"

—How was the Scott Henderson model

"The Later Model" with upgraded sound of "SH" specs ③ Early 2010's RC-Booster [serial number : 17537]



"It's the post Scott Henderson, "RC-Booster." The range is wider, and it feels like the high-end has increased as a result of the influence of the strength of the low-end push, so compared to the early model, it has become a lively character. The gain response is also

good, and if the early model simply amplified the clean sound, this one gives the impression of adding distortion to the clean sound. The low end is

stronger than the early model, but it also produces a super-low that the amp's distortion creates, so it gives the sensation of coming forward when combined with other distortions. It's also excellent as a clean booster, but if used as a gain booster, it can produce thick distortion without using the amp's distortion."



① Inside View

[RC-Booster Ser.#17537 Overview]

- The case is a new proprietary case, and this "RC-Booster" is the typical "later" model since the Scott Henderson specs became standard. The LED indicator, which was moved to the top surface for better visibility, was shipped with mostly blue-colored ones, which changed the visual impression a little. This specification, which uses a two-board system for the sealed pot and replaces the proprietary knob with a small screw, was continued until the "RC-Booster" officially transitioned to "V2" in 2016. A model that can be considered a milestone of the "V1" era in every aspect.

② Serial Number



③ Bypass Switch



④ The foot-switch was changed to the one by Alpha based on advice from Z.Vex. The serial number finally reached the 7,000s in 2007, and shortly thereafter, the standard changed to comply with the RoSH directive (#12061~), indicating a rapid increase in production since 2007.

born?

KS: It was around 2007 when Scott came to me and said, "I want you to listen to my request." At the time, his favorite setting was to turn the volume of the 100-watt 1972 Marshall "Super Lead" all the way up and then use the "RC-Booster" with the "GAIN" full, "VOLUME" full, "TREBLE" at 12 o'clock, and "BASS" at 10 o'clock to enhance the sound. He wanted to reduce the high-pitched noise while adding weight to the sound when playing a G note on the 15th fret of the first string. I realized that Scott was a person who liked jazz, wanted to play Deep Purple, and wanted to be like Jeff Beck. So, I adjusted it according to his request, and the sound was amazing. Therefore, we released the signature model with that specification in 2008.

— I see (laughs). But why did you change all models to the Scott specification?

KS: Scott's use of the pedal was already beyond the range of usage that I knew, but I wanted to try his sense to increase the centripetal force of the pedal. Back then "RC-Booster" was not a product that sells explosively (laughs). It has become a slightly biased character from a versatile personality of the original, but I think the value was there.

— There was also a Scott model that became

the basis for the "RC-Booster V2" in 2015, right?

KS: At the time, there was a part in the album that Scott released where he had to play delicate arpeggios and drive sounds. That's why we made it possible to operate the "GAIN" knob without having to do it live. The 2015 Scott model's feature is "just adding gain" instead of switching between two boosters, and in the end, when trying to do something "seamlessly," this design is good. Scott also liked it. That idea was passed on to "RC-Booster V2."

— What kind of model is the 20th-anniversary model?

KS: This "Classic" version is a "return to self." We returned to the original roots of "RC" from the place where we have been pulled by Scott for a long time. By taking the best parts of now and then, it is now the most user-friendly pedal for me that sounds not too tardily and not too glittery either.

— Just returning to the old sound isn't it?

KS: These models I made in the past were, it feels like, pedals made by someone else (laughs). Anyway, I feel that nowadays there are few people who can reach the sound they want, like "A-ha, this is it!" It's because there

"The Classic model harmonizes the best aspects of the old and current 'RC' pedals."

are various constraints, such as not being able to play at high volume. That's a shame. Even in old music, there are sounds that make you shiver when you listen to them now. I don't want to bury those kinds of sounds. "RC-Booster" can be said as a "difficult-to-use pedal" because it truthfully reproduces the nuances of the player's performance. But because of the difficulty, it could also become a pedal that gives an opportunity to experiment with how to construct a better sound.. I don't know how many people will appreciate the sounds we think are good, but I think it's our job to create products that will lead people's attention to them.

The next-generation "V2" that has made significant advancements

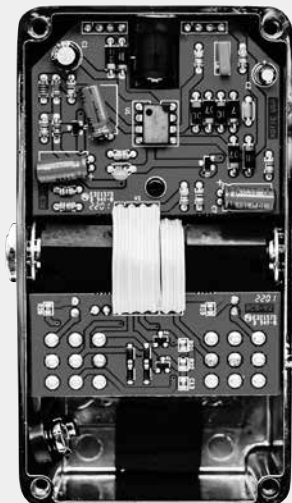
④ RC-Booster V2 [Current model]



"I heard that the right channel is the same as the normal "RC-Booster," but compared to it, the "V2" has more gain, and it distorts sharply when played with a strong attack. It gives the impression of being slightly outside the realm of a clean booster. The "GAIN 2" knob

in the middle is a function that adds gain to the setting of the "GAIN 1" knob, and it is also useful as a two-stage clean booster that can be used by

setting the "GAIN 1" knob to a lower setting for playing rhythm and adding "GAIN 2" by stepping on the switch on the left to create a strong clean tone when you want to push out single-note phrases, etc. Of course, it also can be used as a two-stage gain booster along with distortion."



① Inside View

[RC-Booster V2 Overview]

- In 2016, the previous "RC-Booster" was discontinued and replaced with the new "RC-Booster V2," which was positioned as the new "standard version" for the "RC" line. While it inherits the basic sound and performance of the 2015 Scott Henderson model, there were several minor modifications such as the knobs becoming MXR-style and the addition of compatibility with an 18V power supply. The beautiful mirror finish is achieved through an extremely heavy three-layer plating of nickel, copper, and chrome. Except for the signature, this is also the first "RC" to feature a rear-mounted DC jack.

② Serial Number



③ Controls



④ When engaging the pedal, only "GAIN 1" can be adjusted at first. Then, when stepping on "GAIN 1+2," the control settings for "GAIN 2," which is lit up in the middle of the knob, become active. In other words, it is not possible to use "GAIN 2" alone.