



HeadRush VX5 Vocal Processing Pedal with Antares Auto-Tune

A pedal which delivers studio-grade Auto-Tune that ultimately frustrates in all other departments

BY DANIEL FLITCROFT

THE HEADRUSH VX5 is a dedicated vocal effects unit that incorporates the industry-leading Antares Auto-Tune pitch correction technology into a standalone stomp box for live and studio use. The main selling point for this device is the Auto-Tune feature, which includes two main control knobs, the first being to control the speed of the effect and the second selects the 'humanize' level.

Additional onboard effects such as Reverb, Delay, Chorus and Compressor aim to make the VX5 a versatile vocal processing solution.

Automatic harmonies can be generated on the fly by either manually setting the correct key or using the instrument input to allow the device to listen to the chords being played.

The VX5 can also be used as a simple and basic audio interface, opening the device up to home-recording and creative possibilities through a DAW of your own choosing. A total of 99 factory presets come pre-loaded, with the space to store up to a total of 250.

An A/B mode is included on the left stomp switch to enable individual control of effects mid-song without having to change preset. The right-hand stomp switch can be long-pressed to disable all effects for talking between songs.

The device itself is fairly compact, taking up approximately only 16cm on your pedalboard. It feels robustly made and all the switches, knobs and buttons feel tactile and solid.

The layout of the fairly stripped-down number of switches, buttons and dials allows for easy navigation around the device to tailor individual settings. A bright and clear colour display keeps everything simple and easy to understand.

Performance

The VX5 feels solid and robust, retaining the look and feel of other HeadRush products on the market. The simple layout of the switches and buttons is welcome, keeping only the bare essentials at your fingertips.

The clear selling point of the VX5 is the addition of Antares Auto-Tune. With the 'speed' dial at max and the 'humanize' dial reined right back, the VX5 easily recreates that mid-2000s T-Pain vocal sound. The result is a hard-tuned robotic vocal that seems to have infected the entirety of mainstream music of late. Dialling the settings down to add subtlety to the proceedings is where things get tricky. This device doesn't produce the cleanest vocal signal we've ever heard. Everything has a digital clippy-ness to the signal. More worryingly,

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though, is the noticeable lag on the audio when using pitch correction.

On our first run-through, we wrongly assumed that the Auto-Tune feature was linked to the instrument input, and the unit would listen to the chords we were playing on guitar and select the appropriate key. It transpires that the key and scale must be manually selected within the preset. The instrument input is used only as a 'pass-through' for the device to listen to the chords and process the harmony feature. Sadly, the harmonies on the VX5 are easily the least impressive feature. Only single harmonies are available when using the device in 'instrument' mode. In manual mode, the number of options increases dramatically, allowing for three-part harmonies. A firmware update could improve on this functionality, but this feels like a misstep. Crucially, though, the harmonies don't sound great.

The harmonies often feel crushed and robotic, with various audible artefacts and a noticeable lag before kicking in. They cannot be relied upon in a live environment. Having an instrument input solely for this feature feels pointless. Being a HeadRush product, we would have expected some instrument processing with the VX5. Nothing we tried sounded natural or convincing. To compound our annoyance, the VX5 gives no visual indication that it is picking up the instrument signal. The addition of an LED to confirm that the signal is present would have been welcome.

And finally, we come to the effects. Everything that you would expect is present, with compression, reverb, delay and a variety of novelty effects, all of which work fine; however, the audio signal still sounds noisy. The absence of a tap tempo for the delay setting is frustrating. You would need to spend a great deal of time creating presets for each song in your repertoire before hitting the stage to get any real results. The VX5 cannot be compared to the versatility of something like the TC Helicon Voicelive 3 Extreme, which gives the user more tools in a live setting to adjust on the fly.

musicradar VERDICT



If all you want from a vocal pedal is the classic T-Pain style heavy Auto-Tune sound, then look no further than the VX5. Sadly, however, this device cannot compete as an all-in-one live vocal solution when there are many better options on the market.

PROS

- + Legitimate sounding Auto-Tune, ideal for R'n'B and modern pop.
- + Robust design and build.
- + Bright and clear display.

CONS

- Harmonies and FX feel like an after-thought.
- Instrument input feels redundant.
- Noticeable audio lag.

SPECS

KEY FEATURES: Industry-standard Antares Auto-Tune pitch correction, Dedicated Retune, Speed and Humanize knobs, Additional onboard Reverb, Delay, Chorus, Compressor, and Flavor FX, Harmonizer Mode automatically generates vocal harmonies based on chords from a connected guitar/keyboard, Stereo 24-bit/48kHz USB audio interface functionality to record your vocals directly to your device, USB MIDI connectivity to automate preset changes for your show, Color display and simple menus, Includes 99 factory presets, stores up to 250 total presets A/B Mode for controlling individual effects on/off within a preset, Talk Mode quickly disables all FX for talking to the audience between songs, Premium XLR mic preamp with switchable +48V phantom power XLR line output with ground lift switch
DIMENSIONS: 6.3" x 5.6" x 1.9"
WEIGHT: 2.6lbs

Verdict

We really wanted to like the VX5, but sadly we cannot recommend this product for a live performer. If, however, you're a budding studio recording artist and desperately want that hard-tuned pitch correction out of the box, the VX5 will do the trick.

