

# HELIX

## All Hands Off Deck

In our modern lives we encounter the work of product designers nearly every minute of every day. Every chair we sit on, every door we open, and every button we press started out life as a thought in the head of a designer somewhere, before being made into a product.

Poor designs call attention to themselves by annoying the bejesus out of us (“why is the button for my gas tank in the freaking glove box?”), while good designs become almost transparent – a part of the fabric of modern life that we ignore because they do their jobs effortlessly.

The fact is that we deal with good designs on a daily basis and they’re all around us. Nowadays no one thinks about life before paperclips or belt loops, or life without dead bolts or windshield wipers (or, in my case, automatic home espresso machines), but we notice these things when we’re in need of them and they’re missing.

It is precisely this relationship between human nature and design that can make it difficult to come up with something new, because it takes concerted effort to find a new way to do the same thing better.

Take guitarists, for example. The gear we know and use has changed very little since the 1960’s, in terms of how we interact with it. The guitar gear of today may have more knobs than it used to, and it may be able to do eighty things at once, but the fact remains that it still has knobs. Why? Because we still use our fingers to tweak everything.

The problem is that playing guitar and tweaking knobs can’t really be done at the same time – you actually have to stop doing one thing to do the other. Guitarists are so used to the rhythm of “PLAY-tweak-PLAY-tweak-PLAY” that it feels like “that’s the way it is” to us, and little thought has been given to an alternative. Even though some adventurous manufacturers have tried over the years, no one has yet been able to effectively challenge this way of thinking.

When we were designing Helix, we knew that having touch-sensitive footswitches meant that you could assign an effect to a footswitch in three seconds. It also meant that you could use all of those assigned switches to navigate through the user interface very quickly and pick what you wanted to edit. It was a huge step in the right direction, because it lets the user get around far quicker than they would by moving a joystick back and forth.

But you still needed to use your fingers to tweak the knobs, so it wasn't fast enough yet.

At some point we realized that guitarists actually DO have the onboard equipment needed to do things faster. In fact, they already knew how to incorporate these body parts into a performance because they'd been doing it for their entire lives as electric players.

I'm talking about feet. Yup. The majority of electric guitarists not only have feet, but many of them are actually comfortable manipulating pedals while playing (wah wah and volume pedals were great training tools in this regard). We thought, "why not try and use that familiarity to create a new way of tweaking stuff"?

That thought was the beginning of what eventually became Pedal Edit Mode – a state on Helix where every parameter on any loaded effect block can be tweaked with the expression pedal. Even though it might sound a bit odd at first, most radical technological advances in modern life do. Think about it: when someone first suggested that you would swipe your finger across the face of your phone to navigate to the next photo, it sounded weird. Now it's second nature to most people, as Pedal Edit Mode-style editing will likely be to guitarists in years to come.

When you get a chance, you owe it to yourself to find your local Certified Helix dealer, and try out Pedal Edit Mode for yourself. Pick a preset, and then hold down the MODE footswitch for three seconds to enter Pedal Edit. Then think about what parts of the guitar tone you'd like to tweak, and make those changes using the expression pedal.

I imagine that you'll have a similar experience to the one I had when I tried it for the first time: the initial weirdness that I felt was almost instantly replaced with comfort, realizing that I could continue playing the same riff over and over while I tweaked the amp and effects parameters without stopping. After that first few seconds it was instantly familiar, and it felt natural.

For more information on Pedal Edit Mode and Helix in general, check out [www.line6.com/helix](http://www.line6.com/helix), and then find a Certified dealer and try one out for yourself.