

Free Modular – Boost

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Free Modular Boost – melodic use analysis

This manual shows **one module: Boost** by Free Modular. It is **not a voice, oscillator, filter, envelope, sequencer, or VCA**, so by itself it does **not generate melody**. Instead, it is a **signal-conditioning / coloration module** that can help melodic parts cut through, gain harmonic richness, and interface better with quieter sources.

What Boost does

Boost is an **all-analog gain and soft-ish diode clipping stage** with:

- **Drive**: from roughly **unity gain** up to **+26 dB**
- **Tone**: tilts the high-frequency content after clipping
- **AC-coupled input**: intended for **line-level or Eurorack audio**
- **No CV control**
- Output typically limited to about **13 Vpp** with neutral tone, though high tone boost can push toward rails and cause **severe distortion**

What that means musically

For melodic material, Boost is best thought of as:

- an **overdrive** for basslines, leads, plucks, and arps

- a **harmonic enhancer** to make simple waveforms sound richer
- a **level booster** for quieter external audio before further modular processing
- a way to make a melodic part feel more **present, aggressive, or forward in the mix**

Because it is **input-level sensitive**, you can indirectly “animate” the distortion by changing signal level before it.

Best ways to use Boost in melodic patches

1. Add harmonics to a simple oscillator voice

A plain sine, triangle, or mellow saw can become more melodically expressive with Boost.

Patch idea

- **VCO** → **Boost input**
- **Boost output** → **VCA / filter / mixer**
- Sequence pitch normally with your **sequencer + quantizer**

Result

- Low Drive: subtle thickening
- Medium Drive: more upper harmonics, more presence
- High Drive: overdriven lead or acid-like aggression

Why this helps melody

Extra harmonics make pitch content easier to hear in a mix, especially for: - mono leads - basslines - arpeggios - repetitive sequenced motifs

2. Use it after a filter for expressive lead tones

Putting Boost **after** a filter gives you a more performance-oriented melodic voice.

Patch idea

- VCO → VCF
- VCF → Boost
- Boost → VCA
- Envelope to VCF and VCA as usual

Result

- The filter shapes the tone first
- Boost adds saturation to the already-shaped sound
- Resonant peaks can clip in a pleasing way

Musical use

Great for: - techno leads - electro bass - saturated plucks - expressive monosynth lines

This placement often feels more controlled than driving the filter input.

3. Put it before a filter for dynamic timbral motion

Putting Boost before a filter gives a different character.

Patch idea

- VCO → Boost
- Boost → VCF
- VCF → VCA

Result

- Boost generates harmonics first
- Filter then sculpts those harmonics
- Sweeping the filter creates richer melodic movement

Musical use

Useful when a melody needs to evolve over time: - acid sequences - animated ostinatos - bright plucks with controllable harshness

4. Animate distortion by controlling level before Boost

The manual specifically suggests using a **VCA before Boost** if you want to automate distortion amount.

Patch idea

- **VCO** → **VCA**
- Envelope / CV → **that VCA**
- **VCA output** → **Boost**
- **Boost output** → mixer

Why this is important

Since Boost has **no CV over Drive**, pre-level control becomes your “distortion CV.”

Musical result

You can make individual notes in a melody: - cleaner when quieter - dirtier when accented - more aggressive on strong beats

This is extremely useful for: - accented step sequences - velocity-style dynamic phrasing - call-and-response lead articulation

If you have a sequencer with accent outputs, patch accent CV to the pre-Boost VCA.

5. Preserve melody but add edge with parallel processing

For melodic clarity, parallel distortion works very well.

Patch idea

- Mult your melodic voice
- Path A: dry signal to mixer
- Path B: signal → **Boost** → mixer
- Blend dry and boosted versions

Result

- Dry path keeps pitch and articulation clear
- Boosted path adds bite and harmonics
- Combined sound stays musical and intelligible

Best for

- lead lines
 - bass melodies
 - arpeggios
 - sampled melodic loops
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6. Thicken external melodic sources

Since Boost can bring **line-level** or **mic-level** signals up, it is useful with non-modular melodic material.

Patch idea

- External synth / groovebox / sampler / voice → **Boost**
- Boost output → modular effects / filter / VCA / mixer

Use cases

- saturate a desktop synth melody
- push a vocal phrase into modular processing
- add grit to a sampled piano or loop
- integrate quiet melodic sources into Eurorack level

For vocals or melodic samples, keep Drive moderate if you want intelligibility.

7. Make bass melodies more audible

Basslines often need upper harmonics to be heard on smaller speakers. Boost is very useful here.

Patch idea

- Bass oscillator or sub-mixed voice → **Boost**
- Optional filter after
- Then to final VCA/mix

Settings

- Drive: low to medium
- Tone: slightly right of center if you need definition
- Avoid too much top end if the bass gets fizzy

Result

The root notes and rhythmic motion of a bass melody become easier to perceive.

8. Use Tone as a melodic placement control

The Tone knob is more than brightness; it changes how a melodic line occupies space.

Tone left of center

- smoother
- less harsh
- better for warm basses and rounded leads

Tone right of center

- more bite
- more attack presence
- better for cutting leads, plucks, and arps

Because tone shaping happens **after clipping**, boosting highs can get extreme quickly. That can be excellent for aggressive leads, but it may also make pitch sound less stable if overdone.

Patch roles in a melodic system

With an oscillator

Boost turns a basic oscillator into a more harmonically complex melodic voice.

With a sequencer

Boost won't affect pitch sequencing directly, but it can make repeated sequences feel more alive through accent-driven pre-gain changes.

With a quantizer

No direct interaction, but once pitches are quantized, Boost helps those notes speak more clearly.

With envelopes

Use envelopes on a VCA placed **before** Boost to create note-dependent saturation.

With filters

- **Before filter**: richer harmonic source for subtractive shaping
- **After filter**: polished, driven synth voice

With VCAs

This is the most important pairing from the manual's perspective: - **VCA before Boost** = dynamic distortion control - **VCA after Boost** = control final loudness

With wavefolders / digital distortion

Boost can be the gentler first stage before more extreme processors.

Concrete melodic patch recipes

A. Saturated mono lead

- VCO saw → VCF → Boost → VCA → output
- Sequencer CV to VCO pitch
- Gate to envelope for VCA
- Envelope to filter cutoff

Why it works: filter gives shape, Boost adds bite and sustain-like presence.

B. Accent-sensitive acid line

- VCO square/saw → VCA → Boost → VCF → VCA
- Sequencer pitch to VCO
- Gate to amp envelope
- Accent CV to pre-Boost VCA CV

Why it works: accented notes hit Boost harder and distort more, creating expressive variation across the sequence.

C. Warm bass melody

- Triangle or sine+sub → Boost → low-pass filter → VCA
- Drive low to medium
- Tone slightly left of center

Why it works: adds enough harmonics for note definition while staying full and rounded.

D. Parallel lead enhancer

- Main melodic voice muffled
- Dry path to mixer
- Second path to Boost, then mixer
- Blend to taste

Why it works: preserves note clarity while adding aggression and mix presence.

E. External synth melody into modular

- External synth output → Boost → modular filter/delay/reverb

- Keep Drive near low or medium at first

Why it works: level-matches and colors external melodic material for modular integration.

Practical cautions

- **AC-coupled input** means this is for **audio**, not for processing pitch CV or slow modulation in a meaningful way.
 - At high **Tone** and high **Drive**, harsh upper harmonics can dominate and obscure melodic clarity.
 - Since there is **no CV**, any rhythmic or note-by-note change in distortion needs to come from **input amplitude changes** before the module.
 - If you want distortion without a large output jump, **attenuate after Boost** as the manual suggests.
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Bottom line

Boost is a supporting melodic utility, not a melody generator.

Its strongest role in melodic music is to make existing pitched material more vivid by adding:

- gain
- saturation
- harmonic density
- presence
- accent-responsive overdrive when paired with a pre-VCA

If you share the other module manuals too, I can analyze **how the modules work together as a full melodic system** and propose complete patches for leads, basslines, arps, and chordal textures.

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