

The Boss RC-5 Loop Station, Domesticated

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Short Version

The BOSS RC-5 is an excellent looper in a single-pedal format: honest sound, 99 memory slots, a built-in drum machine, and enough brains to carry your whole live set. As an instrument under your foot — recommended without reservations.

As a device you manage data on, it is a time machine back to the nineties: slot names are typed by scrolling a knob through a character list, the pedal guesses the tempo of an uploaded loop (and often guesses wrong), and the official software does exactly one thing. The good news: all of it is

fixable for free and without a soldering iron — `{/felitronics/loopercat|LooperCat}`, our open-source loop manager for the RC-5. The pedal plays, the cat cleans the litter box.

What the BOSS RC-5 Is

The BOSS RC-5 Loop Station is a compact looper in the standard BOSS enclosure: one pedal, one stereo track, 99 memory slots. Record a phrase — the pedal loops it, overdubs go on top. A classic of the genre, cast into a brick that will outlive its owner (it is a BOSS; they are all like that).

Inside, it is surprisingly grown-up:

- **99 slots** — each with its own name (12 characters, exactly the width of the display), its own tempo, rhythm, and settings like One Shot: play once and stop — backing-track mode.
- **Sound without compromise** — loops are stored as 32-bit float WAV.^[1] No "good enough for a pedal": a bounce from your DAW comes back as the same bounce.
- **A drum machine** — rhythm patterns per slot and a count-in: the pedal can count one bar before the loop or before recording (two different parameters — PLAY COUNT and REC COUNT — and it will make you pay for confusing them).
- **USB** — the pedal can pretend to be a flash drive (STORAGE mode: a plain FAT card with plain WAV files inside) and speaks USB-MIDI.

Firmware at the time of this post: Ver 1.10 (December 2023). The manufacturer apparently considers the pedal finished. We, as you will see below, do not quite agree.

How I Use It

My main scenario is not classic live looping but **backing tracks on stage**. The whole set lives in the slots: `Deep Space 1`, `CatsHardDay`, `5thDimension`... Every slot is One Shot: press — the track plays exactly once and stops, instead of looping at the most dramatic moment. Add Play Count-In: the pedal counts one bar at the slot's tempo and starts the track. You could never explain this level of punctuality to a human drummer — they would take offense.

The second scenario is rehearsal: a bounce from the DAW goes onto the pedal, and you play your parts over a ready backing track with no laptop in the room. Guitar, pedal, combo amp — the whole stack.

And of course the day job: record a phrase, loop it, layer on top. Here the RC-5 does exactly what it promises and does it well. The pedal itself is never the problem. The problems start when you need to **work** with the loops — rename, listen, trim, upload twenty backing tracks before a gig.

Impressions

As hardware, the RC-5 is excellent. The switch is precise, the display is readable, the sound is honest — the float format means the pedal does not chew on your mix. Zero complaints on this side.

Now the dark side. The RC-5 has a data-entry interface from the era when you typed a text message

by pressing the "7" key four times:

- **Slot names.** Twelve characters, entered by scrolling a knob through a character list. Twelve characters. Ninety-nine slots. Do the math, then go get yourself some catnip.
- **The tempo is guessed.** On WAV import the pedal assumes every loop is a power-of-two number of bars: 4, 8, 16... If your track dared to be 6 bars long, the tempo comes out wrong and the built-in rhythm drifts away from the music. Silently.
- **16-bit WAV is silently dropped.** Upload a file in the wrong format and the pedal simply does not see it. No error, no explanation. The slot stays empty; direct your questions to the universe.
- **macOS plants landmines.** Copy a WAV onto the mounted pedal with Finder, and an invisible sidecar file (`._*`, AppleDouble) quietly lands next to it.^[2] On the next boot the pedal may greet you with `LOOPER DATA READ ERR` and refuse to start — without explaining why.

None of this makes it a bad pedal. It makes it a pedal that desperately needs a proper companion on the computer.

Who the RC-5 May Not Be For

If you build live looping from several independent tracks — beat separate, bass separate, vocals separate — the RC-5's single stereo track will feel cramped fast. That is the territory of its bigger siblings: RC-500, RC-505, RC-600.

And it is a pedal, not a DAW. Trimming a loop, viewing a waveform, sorting a hundred sketches into order — on the pedal itself this is either impossible, or possible in a way that makes you wish it were impossible. For all of that you need a computer — which is what the next section is about.

The Half-Finished BOSS TONE STUDIO

The pedal comes with official software — BOSS TONE STUDIO for RC. Let's be honest and skip the internet myths: it exists, it works with the RC-5, and one of its tricks is genuinely good — the app switches the pedal into STORAGE mode by itself over USB-MIDI, sparing you the nightly pilgrimage through `SETUP → USB → STORAGE`.

That is where the good news ends. In practice, Tone Studio does exactly one thing — upload a WAV to the pedal. That's it. The rest of the screen is a showcase of videos nobody asked for. Rename a slot? No. Listen to whatever has settled in slot 37? No. Fix the tempo, diagnose the card, make a backup? No, no, and no. The pedal stores plain WAV files on a plain FAT card, in the twenty-first century — and the official software shows you videos.

How We Fixed It: LooperCat

We are musicians and engineers, we have a cat, and we took this personally. So we took the RC-5 format apart down to the byte — every fact pinned by tests against a real pedal — borrowed Tone Studio's single useful SysEx trick, and built `{felitronics/loopercat|LooperCat}`: a free, open-source loop manager for the BOSS RC-5 on Mac, Windows, and Linux.

What it does:

- **All 99 slots in one table** — name, duration, bars, tempo, One Shot. The whole litter at a glance.
- **Names from a real keyboard**, not a knob and a character list. Twelve characters in two seconds instead of an evening of knob-scrolling.
- **Playback straight from the slot** — double click, waveform, seeking. The mystery of slot 37 gets solved without copying files anywhere.
- **Tempo and bars — together and correct**: the very arithmetic the pedal skips on import. The built-in rhythm lines up with the music again.
- **WAV in both directions** — a backing track from your DAW is converted to the pedal's native format on the fly: sample rate, bit depth, channels, header bytes. 16-bit no longer vanishes silently — it simply becomes float and lives.
- **A backup before every write, a trash bin, and macOS minefield sweeping** — invisible `._*` files are swept away, a built-in doctor checks the card's integrity, and `LOOPER DATA READ ERR` becomes a ghost story from a past life.

And the cat breaks nothing: every operation travels with a backup, and foreign cards (RC-500/505/600 — a similar but different data dialect) are politely turned away at the door instead of "it will probably be fine".

If you love the terminal, there is [rc5cat](#): our own CLI on the same knowledge of the format — that is where it all started. But the native LooperCat has gone much further.

The RC-5 is an excellent pedal. Now it has `{/felitronics/loopercat | excellent software}` too. Purr.

LooperCat is an independent project: not affiliated with or endorsed by the pedal's manufacturer; "BOSS RC-5" and "BOSS TONE STUDIO" are used nominatively, to indicate compatibility.

Frequently Asked Questions

How do I rename slots on the Boss RC-5 from a computer?

With [LooperCat](#) — a free, open-source Boss RC-5 editor for Mac, Windows, and Linux: names are typed on a real keyboard (12 characters — exactly the width of the pedal's display), and all 99 slots are visible in one table. The official BOSS TONE STUDIO for RC cannot rename slots.

How do I put a backing track onto the Boss RC-5?

Bounce from your DAW → [LooperCat](#) → Push WAV here... The file is converted to the pedal's native format on the fly (32-bit float WAV: sample rate, channels, header bytes). Switch on One Shot and Play Count-In — and the backing track is stage-ready: the pedal counts one bar and plays the track exactly once.

Why does the Boss RC-5 detect the wrong tempo for an uploaded loop?

On WAV import the pedal assumes the loop spans a power-of-two number of bars (4, 8, 16...). Any other loop gets a wrong tempo, and the built-in rhythm drifts away from the music. [LooperCat](#) writes tempo and bars coherently — the very arithmetic the pedal skips.

What does LOOPER DATA READ ERR mean on the Boss RC-5?

The pedal could not read the card's data. A frequent cause on a Mac is the invisible macOS sidecar files (`._*`, AppleDouble) that Finder silently plants when you copy WAVs onto the mounted pedal; another is damaged service structures on the card. [LooperCat](#) sweeps the invisible files away and checks the card with a built-in doctor; upload loops through it and the message never comes up.

Does Boss Tone Studio work with the RC-5?

It does — minimally: BOSS TONE STUDIO for RC exists, works with the RC-5, and in practice does one thing — uploads a WAV to the pedal. No slot names, no tempo, no playback, no card diagnostics. For everything else there is a free alternative — [LooperCat](#).

[1] 32-bit float is a floating-point format with enormous level headroom; the same class of format is used by modern field recorders. For a looper it means: what you upload is what plays.

[2] AppleDouble is how macOS stores its metadata on "foreign" file systems: next to `loop.wav` an invisible `._loop.wav` appears. To the pedal's FAT card it is an alien object.