



Behringer stompboxes £15

The pedals that have got everyone talking finally land in the UK, but can a £15 stompbox genuinely do the business? by Chris Vinnicombe

The rivals

BOSS Compact Effects series (from £39)
Danelectro Fab pedals (from £19)
DigiTech X-Series (from £89)

So many BOSS units are practically the industry standard, and there are very few players indeed who don't have at least one of their pedals. There are direct alternatives to all of the Behringer units on test within the BOSS catalogue. With built-in cabinet modelling, the DigiTech X-Series pedals are also well worth auditioning, while the Danelectro Fab units are providing Behringer with stiff competition for the accolade of best value stompboxes around

Behringer kicked up something of a storm at the Winter NAMM show earlier in 2005 with a new range of compact effects pedals that were rather unashamed clones – visually, at least – of established BOSS counterpart designs, even down to colour coding for the various effect types. As we reported back in issue 262, the threat of litigation from Roland precipitated a swift cosmetic redesign, and finally Behringer's stompboxes have hit the shops. This would be relatively unremarkable in an industry flooded with a glut of 'copy' products, were it not for the fact that Behringer's new pedal range starts at just £15. Yes, that's right: a stompbox for less than the cost of three sets of strings or a high-quality capo.

An initial glance at these units proves that it doesn't exactly take a degree in electronics to spot the corresponding BOSS model that seems to have, ahem, inspired their design. For example, compare the Ultra Distortion to the BOSS DS-2, or the Ultra Tremolo to the BOSS TR-2 and so on. That said, we'll obviously judge these Behringer units on their own individual merits.

The electronics themselves are housed in plastic that is approximately 2.5mm thick and, while not as kick-proof as a diecast casing, it is robust enough to endure vigorous stomping. Battery access is achieved by depressing the black plastic hinges in with a ballpoint pen or similar pointy tool. This is no major headache;



BEHRINGER BO100	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

- **WE LIKED** The price; surprising range of high quality drive sounds on offer
- **WE DISLIKED** Nothing – go out and buy one of these!

although it's worth taking care when reassembling the unit to make sure that the spring lines up correctly with the small plastic notch that holds it in



BEHRINGER OD100	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

- **WE LIKED** Those 'halfway' sounds between overdrive and distortion
- **WE DISLIKED** Distortion alone is too scooped and fizzy for our tastes

place. The switching system doesn't feel quite as solid underfoot as a BOSS unit, but on the other hand we found it much more confidence-inspiring than



BEHRINGER TO100	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

■ **WE LIKED** A classy bluesy lead tone for £15? Yes please!

■ **WE DISLIKED** Not the most versatile dirtbox here



BEHRINGER UC100	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

■ **WE LIKED** Great price for a stereo chorus pedal

■ **WE DISLIKED** Uninspiring, generic tone



BEHRINGER UD100	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

■ **WE LIKED** Ballsy voicing is great for dirty riffing and powerchord rhythms

■ **WE DISLIKED** Not a great lead tone



BEHRINGER BO100 BLUES OVERDRIVE

PRICE: £15

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Analogue overdrive pedal

CONTROLS: Level, tone, gain

CONNECTIONS: 6.4mm jack input and output, 9-volt DC barrel adaptor socket

MIDI: No

POWER: PP3 9-volt battery or Behringer PSU-SB DC power supply (£TBC)

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: The Behringer stompbox range includes everything from line selectors (AB100, £15) to analogue modelling preamps (V-Tone Guitar GD121, £31)

Behringer

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BEHRINGER OD100 OVERDRIVE DISTORTION

As BO100 except...

TYPE: Analogue overdrive/distortion pedal

FEATURES: Mode control blends the overdrive and distortion voices

CONTROLS: Level, tone, drive, mode

BEHRINGER TO100 TUBE OVERDRIVE

As BO100 except...

CONTROLS: Drive, tone, level

BEHRINGER UC100 ULTRA CHORUS

As BO100 except...

TYPE: Stereo chorus pedal

CONTROLS: Level, tone, rate, depth

CONNECTIONS: 6.4mm jack input and twin stereo outputs, 9-volt DC barrel adaptor socket

BEHRINGER UD100 ULTRA DISTORTION

As BO100 except...

TYPE: Analogue distortion pedal

FEATURES: Ultra mode switch offers two preset voicings

CONTROLS: Two-position slider switch, level, tone, distortion

the plastic switches used on some pedals, so it's all relative depending upon whether you are a Vinnie Jones or a Ronaldinho when it comes to onstage footwork.

Clearly we aren't in audiophile territory here, but there can be few complaints about the build quality for the money. For example, the plastic knobs grip the pot shafts tightly enough to ensure that they won't easily go astray, and this is something basic we've not seen on pedals in recent months that are much higher spec and considerably more expensive. We conducted a preliminary evaluation of the Behringers' bypass circuits, it was arguable that the units might have been responsible for a very slight high end loss, but the tonally anal should probably be reminded at this juncture that a) these pedals are 15 quid each, and b) noisy curly leads and stompboxes without true bypass didn't hinder the likes of Jimi and SRV as they set about defining what are now benchmark electric guitar tones.

SOUNDS: Powering up our valve combo, we begin with what appears to be one of the most simple of our octet of Behringers...

BO100 Blues Overdrive

In the low reaches of the pedal's gain control, blues-rock riffing and 'woman' tone lead lines are catered for amply

with just the right balance between raunch and smoothness. Perhaps the ace up the Blues Overdrive's sleeve is what it can do over and above its remit. Rev the gain right up – and there's a surprising amount on tap – and back the tone off, and with the guitar's neck pickup selected there's a huge neo-fuzz tone on the verge of meltdown; great for fat, sustaining single note riffs and evil-sounding chord sequences. Any cynicism held towards a £15 overdrive pedal is rendered utterly redundant after five minutes with the BO100.

OD100 Overdrive Distortion

Adjusting the mode control on this pedal that blends overdrive and distortion to taste, we found our favourite settings between 10 and two o'clock with the drive also set to around two o'clock. This yields a solid, muscular drive sound that is great for alternative rock and the grungier end of the indie spectrum. At the extreme ends of the mode control, the overdriven side of the equation is predictably the most organic sound, and if you ever needed a practical lesson in how scooping mids reduces your ability to cut through a mix with any real authority, twist the control hard clockwise to hear your guitar sound disappear.

TO100 Tube Overdrive

Milder than the Blues Overdrive with

a voicing closer to a Tube Screamer-type level of drive, the TO100 has an appealing raunch and warmth that's perfectly voiced for classic rock riffing and emotive soloing, and has the best conventional lead voice of the pedals on test. Boosting a valve combo already on the edge of break-up produces suitably creamy results, if not a massive injection of extra level.

UC100 Ultra Chorus

Our first foray into Behringer's modulation pedals proves less than entirely fruitful. In mono mode straight into the amplifier, this is a pretty uninspiring, generic chorus sound that reminded us of the less musical end of the early nineties digital multi-effects processor spectrum. The stereo option widens the appeal and inevitably the scope of the sound somewhat, but the voicing remains disappointingly bland.

UD100 Ultra Distortion

Behringer claims that the Ultra Distortion's twin modes are voiced for warm riff rock and screaming lead respectively. Engaging the pedal in mode one is immediately rather satisfying. There's grain rather than fizz, and aggressive riffs sound suitably meaty. The second Ultra mode is filthier and really seems to throw mid frequencies into relief. Neither sound is too scooped and there's plenty of level on tap.

**BEHRINGER UF100****ULTRA FLANGER**

As B0100 except...

TYPE: Compact

modulation pedal

FEATURES: Mode switch toggles between jet and detuned voicings**CONTROLS:** Two-position mode slider switch, manual, depth, rate, resonance**BEHRINGER UP100****ULTRA PHASE SHIFTER**

As B0100 except...

TYPE: Compact

modulation pedal

FEATURES: Mode switch toggles between negative and positive feedback**CONTROLS:** Two-position mode slider switch, level, rate, depth, resonance**BEHRINGER UT100****ULTRA TREMOLO**

As B0100 except...

TYPE: Compact

modulation pedal

FEATURES: Wave control blends the voicing through degrees of V-shaped and square wave tremolo effects**CONTROLS:** Rate, wave, depth

BEHRINGER UF100	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

- **WE LIKED** The detuned mode provides plenty of thrills and spills
- **WE DISLIKED** One cannot exactly bask in the analogue warmth of the effect

→ **UF100 Ultra Flanger**

The first position of the pedal's dual mode switch approximates the classic jet flanger sound, while the second is a warped, detuned flanger. Proceedings become rather sci-fi at higher rate levels as note decays are contorted into spirals. At levels around halfway on the rate control, and with the depth pushed up in mode two, there's a cool glitchiness that will really polarise opinion, but which in combination with a delay pedal could make for some truly out-there soundscapes. If you want a warm, musical, conventional flanger, then this probably isn't the one you want, but it does weirdness rather effectively.

UP100 Ultra Phase Shifter

By no means as lush and smooth as a classic phaser such as an Electro-Harmonix Small Stone, there's a slightly cold, robotic edge to the UP100's basic tone. The mode switch may well give you two phaser sounds – one with negative and one with positive feedback – but unfortunately neither of these sounds proves to be particularly musical or inspiring. Like the Ultra Chorus, the Ultra Phase Shifter represents something of a missed opportunity.



BEHRINGER UP100	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

- **WE LIKED** Again, a dual mode phaser for £15 is superb value
- **WE DISLIKED** Just as generic and uninspiring as its sibling, the UC100

UT100 Ultra Tremolo

Unlike its apparent inspiration, the BOSS TR-2, there is no significant drop in output when the UT100 is engaged. The quality of the tremolo effect is versatile and very musical, with anything from a slow, hypnotic pulse to a Leslie-like warble available with varying intensity from the softer, vintage amplifier-like V-shape to square wave staccato stutters. If a tremolo

pedal has always seemed an appealing, if non-essential, purchase, here's the ideal opportunity to add one to your arsenal.

Verdict

With quality modelling amplifiers below £150 these days, and now decent sounding stompboxes retailing at £15, has there ever been a better time to go shopping for new gear?

Another great thing about these stompboxes is that if you fancy a new modulation pedal, or a different flavour of dirtbox, it's now significantly cheaper to experiment. They are not the most physically robust pedals around, but then they don't give the impression that they're about to fall apart either.

Regardless of cost, several of these units are very good sounding pedals indeed. The Blues Overdrive and Ultra



BEHRINGER UT100	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

- **WE LIKED** Outperforms the BOSS TR-2 and doesn't suffer from its characteristic level drop when engaged
- **WE DISLIKED** At this price, nothing

Tremolo in particular would be worthy additions to anyone's rig, and while the other modulation pedals aren't exactly awe-inspiring, there really is something for everyone in the palette of dirty sounds offered between the Ultra Distortion, Tube Overdrive and Overdrive Distortion. With Digital Stereo Reverb and Delay pedals on the way for as little as £22 RRP, Behringer looks poised to clean up. **B**

Behringer B0100 Blues Overdrive**Guitarist RATING** ★★★★★**Behringer OD100 Overdrive Distortion****Guitarist RATING** ★★★★★**Behringer T0100 Tube Overdrive****Guitarist RATING** ★★★★★**Behringer UC100 Ultra Chorus****Guitarist RATING** ★★★★★**Behringer UD100 Ultra Distortion****Guitarist RATING** ★★★★★**Behringer UF100 Ultra Flanger****Guitarist RATING** ★★★★★**Behringer UP100 Ultra Phase Shifter****Guitarist RATING** ★★★★★**Behringer UT100 Ultra Tremolo****Guitarist RATING** ★★★★★