

Maxon pedals £95-£199

The original manufacturer of the Tube Screamer returns to the UK and we get our hands on a quintet of dirtboxes with a formidable heritage by Chris Vinnicombe

Whenever we see a green overdrive pedal, it's difficult not to feel that this is a reference to arguably the most sought after and imitated pedal of them all: the Ibanez TS-808. However, that's not to say that what we have here is simply another procession of Tube Screamer clones. In reality, excluding the Sound Tank series, the Japanese electronics wizards at Maxon designed and built all of the Ibanez pedals from 1974 until the latter part of the 1990s, along with the pickups on many of the sought after 'lawsuit' electric guitars in the 1970s. Maxon's partnership with Ibanez's parent company Hoshino proved very fruitful indeed, and saw

Maxon units distributed worldwide under the Ibanez brand; open up the back of any Ibanez pedal of that era and the Maxon name will be visible on the circuit board.

While these days the Ibanez TS-808 and TS-9 reissues are no longer manufactured by Maxon at its Nisshin Onpa factory in Japan, many of the company's classic models survive as part of current Maxon range. With this kind of heritage, it's fair to say that Maxon knows its onions when it comes to overdrive pedals. But while production has remained constant, UK availability has been sketchy at best with only a handful of stores which specialise in esoterica, such as

Charlie Chandler's Guitar Experience, carrying any stock. French-based company Filling Distribution are now handling these units in the UK, so hopefully they will soon become more commonplace in music shops around the country.

The five Maxon stompboxes here are culled from across four ranges. The Nine Series will be cosmetically familiar to anyone with any experience of the Ibanez TS-9, first introduced by Ibanez in 1982 as a successor to 1979's 0 Series that included the original TS-808. Maxon's similarly retro Reissue Series pedals are housed in smaller standard die-cast cases with much the same proportions as an MXR pedal,



MAXON PEDALS £95-£199

EFFECTS CD TRACKS 4 & 5



The OD-9 recalls Ibanez's eighties designs

OD-9	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★
■ WE LIKED Sounds better and more open to our ears than the current Ibanez equivalent; subtle variation on the OD-808	
■ WE DISLIKED Not everyone gets on with the type of footswitch employed here	

and its representative here is the OD808. The larger OD-820 Overdrive Pro that we have here is accompanied in the Vintage Series by a distortion, an analogue phaser and the superb AD-999 analogue delay (see spec checks for the current models and

prices), which we'll be getting to grips with in a future issue. Finally, the Real Tube Series pedals all feature 12AX7/ECC83 valves integrated into the circuit; some of you may remember the Ibanez Tube King overdrive, which was very similar.

The OD-9, OD-820 and OD808 are all equipped with the JRC4558D dual op-amp chip as found in many of the original TS-808s, so you'd expect them to share a lot of tonal ground (some Tube Screamer aficionados will argue that the grittier-sounding Malaysian RC4558P is the Holy Grail in Tube Screamer tone: for the full story, check out the excellent book Analog Man's Guide To Vintage Effects, from www.formusiciansonly.com). The Distortion & Sustainer II and Real Overdrive/Distortion promise to be different animals and altogether dirtier.

The construction standard across all of the units is uniformly high, with everything securely fastened and robust enough to withstand a vigorous shoeing. All units can be powered by a single nine-volt battery or mains adaptor, apart from the valve-equipped ROD881, which requires a nine-volt adaptor that is helpfully supplied. This unit also features a somewhat more complex circuit in comparison to the quartet of what are essentially straight-ahead drive/tone/level dirtboxes, albeit with slight variations in demarcation. In contrast, the ROD881 features an expanded three-band EQ, a toggle for ➔

MAXON OD-9 OVERDRIVE

PRICE: £95

ORIGIN: Japan

TYPE: Analogue overdrive pedal

CONTROLS: Drive, tone, level

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

POWER: PP3 nine-volt battery or nine-volt adaptor

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: The Nine Series also features the SD-9 Sonic Distortion (£100), the FL-9 Flanger (£160), the CS-9 Stereo Chorus (£155) and the AF-9 Auto Filter (£125)

Filling Distribution
+33 01 48 78 01 20
www.maxon.co.jp/eng/e_index.html



MAXON OD808 OVERDRIVE

As D & S II (see p127), except...

PRICE: £95

TYPE: Analogue

overdrive pedal
CONTROLS: Overdrive, tone, balance

MAXON ROD881 REAL OVERDRIVE/DISTORTION

As OD-9, except...

PRICE: £199

TYPE: Analogue overdrive/distortion pedal with integrated preamp valve

CONTROLS: Twin footswitches toggle effect bypass and boost, two-way mini toggle selects overdrive or distortion voicing, rotary controls for gain, master, bass, middle and treble, noise reduction circuit features on/off switch and rotary threshold control

POWER: Nine-volt mains adaptor only (included)

ADDITIONAL FEATURES:

One 12AX7/ECC83 valve

RANGE OPTIONS: Also features the ROD880 Real Overdrive (£195) and the RCP660 Real Compressor (£180)

The rivals

ROD881

AMT Electronics Tube Magnum £142
Electro-Harmonix English Muff'n £169
Mesa/Boogie V-Twin £399

We checked out a range of AMT stompboxes in issue 269. Of the Tube Magnum, we remarked: "the drive ranges from a throaty Tube Screamer-like mid-range kick to a denser high gain crunch with fluid sustain". The English Muff'n comes equipped with not one, but two 12AX7/ECC83 valves and can do a range of Brit-inspired overdrive sounds that can approximate anything from Hendrix to Slayer. And yes, the V-Twin is expensive, but when it comes to valve-toting dirt machines, Mesa is the first choice for many pros



★★★★★
Guitarist
CHOICE

We detected a little more edge and graininess from the OD-9, and found a little extra refinement in the smoother tones of the OD808

→ the selection of overdrive and distortion voicings, an extra boost mode and built-in noise reduction with an independent on/off switch and rotary threshold control. Right, let's get stomping...

OD-9 & OD808

As we have already established, these pedals can essentially be thought of as reworkings of the original TS-808 and TS-9 Tube Screamer circuits, so as expected they deliver very creamy and boisterous lead sounds in abundance. Even to the well-trained ear, the voices of the OD808 and OD-9 can appear to sound almost identical in a loud mix, both boosting the signal into a valve amplifier on the verge of break-up, and flat-out overdriving a clean amp; but listen closely and there are subtle textural differences. We detected a little more edge and graininess from the OD-9, and found a little extra refinement in the smoother tones of the OD808. Although there isn't a lot in it, we just about preferred the 808 overall as it felt a little more authentic for both bluesy lead and classic rock riffs.



OD808	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

■ **WE LIKED** Just edges the OD-9 in the sound stakes (this is inevitably subjective); a third cheaper than the Ibanez version

■ **WE DISLIKED** Nothing: it works superbly

ROD881	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

■ **WE LIKED** Raw, organic overdrive and distortion in abundance; useful boost mode

■ **WE DISLIKED** What happens if you find it too noisy but don't like the noise gate?



Flipping the ROD881's voicing switch reveals a subtle difference

ROD881

This pedal is an untamed beast that can cope with more subtle applications, but is happiest with the gain revved up in either OD or distortion mode. Rather than a totally different sound, flipping the voicing switch reveals a more subtle difference, and both settings have oodles of grit and filth. Our favourite

all-out distortion sound was actually found with the toggle switch set to OD, which seemed a little more organic. Not loud enough for your glorious riff or solo moment? Simply kick in the boost to hammer your amp's front end even harder. The pedal's built-in noise gate is a welcome addition to the circuit as without it engaged, when the master and gain controls are cranked, →

MAXON DISTORTION & SUSTAINER II

As OD-9, except...
PRICE: £105
TYPE: Analogue distortion pedal
CONTROLS: Distortion, balance, tone
RANGE OPTIONS: The Reissue Series also features the D&S Distortion/Sustainer (£99), the CP-101 Compressor (£105), the PT-999 Phase Tone (£105) and the GE-601 Graphic Equaliser (£115)

MAXON OD-820 OVERDRIVE PRO

As OD-9 except...
PRICE: £170 (includes mains adaptor)
RANGE OPTIONS: The Vintage Series also features the DS-830 Distortion Master (£170), the AD-999 Analog Delay (£255) and the PH-350 Rotary Phaser (£199)

The rivals

STANDARD STOMPBOXES

Behringer BD100 Blues Overdrive	£15
BOSS DS1	£39
Ibanez TS-808 Tube Screamer	£149

Behringer has moved the goalposts when it comes to what constitutes great value from an effects pedal, but the Blues Overdrive is a great sounding unit regardless of price and can get very dirty indeed if need be. Several members of the Guitarist team have already bought one! We checked out a new Ibanez TS-808 reissue back in issue 251 and salivated over its tonal properties so it's definitely another flavour worth sampling. If it's a frill-free standalone distortion you are after, the DS1 is still hugely popular and a key element in such seemingly disparate tones as those of Steve Vai and Kurt Cobain



D&S II	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

- **WE LIKED** Juicy sound for garage and alternative rock, fun in abundance
- **WE DISLIKED** Lack of a conventional heavy metal distortion may limit appeal

OD-820	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

- **WE LIKED** Great sound throughout the range of the drive control; plenty of level for use as a boost; feels like a top-notch professional product
- **WE DISLIKED** Despite the fantastic sound, it seems a tad expensive

→ quite a bit of extraneous squeal and static creeps into the gaps. Of course, there are certainly times when this is desirable in the right musical context. At the highest threshold the noise reduction audibly squashes the tail of long sustained notes as they decay, so be wary if you're going for those Gary Moore-style sustaining bends.

D&S II

This is a cool little dirtbox. It's not the biggest level boost when engaged, but there's just enough to kick in with the necessary venom. Rather than being geared towards palm muting and metal riffing, with the distortion and balance right up and the tone around one o'clock there's a great trashy edge



CIOKS BIG JOHN POWER SUPPLY £75

WWW.CIOKS.COM

Amongst the other products that Filling Distribution handle is a range of power supplies manufactured by Danish company Cioks. We found the seven output, 600 milliamp Big John rather useful when testing these Maxon

stompboxes, but it's well worth checking out the 280 milliamp Baby (£65) and the Double Jack (£80). Both can power up to five nine-volt outputs, while the Double Jack benefits from an additional pair of 12-volt sockets and can handle up to 600 milliamps. A range of adaptors start at £4 and come in different lengths and configurations, so that those Line 6 and old-school pedals can be powered too.

that's perfect for gonzoid riffing and Mudhoney-style alt-rock playing.

OD-820

Easily the loudest and dirtiest of the overdrive stompboxes here, the OD-820 also has the most extra kick when used as a level boost with drive rolled off. A fantastic all-rounder, the 820 creeps into musical distortion territory at the top end of the drive range, but can cover more mellow territory with finesse. There's a professional vibe that goes with the whole experience of using this pedal, and it's well worth the extra space it will take up on your pedalboard.

Verdict

Are the OD-9, OD808 and OD-820 overdrives better than the current Ibanez reissues, or the myriad boutique clones or after-market modified units from the likes of Keeley and Analog Man? It's a contentious question, but to our ears the Maxons at least trump the current Ibanez crop and provide

worthy alternatives if shopping for any of the other Tube Screamer-a-likes. The OD-820's weighty £170 price tag also doesn't seem quite so painful when compared to some of its Stateside boutique rivals, and it is an undeniably great-sounding pedal. At the dirtier end of the spectrum, the Distortion & Sustainer II and valve-driven ROD881 are not really heavy metal pedals, but are great for noisy, attitude-laden rock of many creeds. **B**

Maxon OD-9 Overdrive

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

Maxon ROD881

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

Maxon Distortion & Sustainer II

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

Maxon OD808 Overdrive

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

Maxon OD-820 OverDrive Pro

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★