

BOSS LEGEND SERIES FBM-1 & FDR-1 Both £116
EFFECTS



BOSS FBM-1 '59 Bassman & FDR-1 '65 Deluxe Reverb Both £116

Can you squeeze a valve amplifier into a pedal? We look at a brace of BOSS boxes claiming to do just that *by Mick Taylor*

Anyone with an eye on instrument giants Fender or Roland just lately will have noticed a certain cosy relationship. The pair has worked together for years now, creating the best marriage of a Fender Strat and a Roland MIDI pickup, which in turn cleared the way for the impressive digital VG Stratocaster (reviewed issue 290). But why stop there? Roland's sister brand BOSS has also jumped between the sheets with the mighty F and spawned this pair of highly intriguing pedals: the first in BOSS's Legend Series. Fender's all-valve vintage reissue amps digitally modelled and packed into

BOSS stompboxes? Now there's a tempting proposition...

FBM-1 '59 Bassman & FDR-1 '65 Deluxe Reverb-Amp

So just how do you cram a whole amplifier into a stompbox? Well, if you're BOSS, you start with the Compact chassis that is to effects pedals what the Strat is to guitars: an undisputed classic. Both models use the die-cast shell, complete with chassis-secured pots and jack sockets and BOSS's customary flip-top pedal section to give access to the single nine-volt battery. These are digital pedals though, so power

consumption is relatively high; BOSS states around three hours with a zinc carbon battery, up to 10 with an alkaline, so best invest in a suitable 9V DC adaptor as, sadly, there's not one supplied.

Rather than the usual smooth finish of most BOSS compacts, the FBM-1 and FDR-1 have a textured coat in the colours of their namesakes; a sort of mustard yellow to create a mock-tweed effect in the case of the '59 Bassman, and black for the Tolex-covered '65 Deluxe Reverb. And very fetching they are too. Aside from the complement of two single- and two dual-concentric pots plus a status indicator per

pedal, that's where the similarities between these two end.

In terms of features, the '59 Bassman pedal replicates the real amp's control panel but with one crucial difference: the reissue amplifier (as indeed are all classic Tweed Bassmans) is a non-master volume design so simply has a single 'volume'. Here, thankfully, you get gain and volume on the right-hand dual concentric pot, meaning you can crank the virtual front end for all the overdrive character you like. We'll come on to that in a bit. There's also a 'bright' input because the '59 Bassman amplifier has two channels: bright and normal.

The '65 Deluxe Reverb plays a similar hand in replicating the controls of the 'real' amp, again with the addition of gain and level pots to give you more control over drive level and texture. This one is a little more involved, however, as you also get provision for vibrato and reverb. The vibrato (it is in fact tremolo) is adjustable for speed via tap tempo, as well as intensity via the top-panel knob.

Given that so much of these classic amp sounds has to do with



A dual-concentric pot controls presence/middle on the Bassman...



...and vibrato/reverb on the Deluxe Reverb. Er, except the vibrato is tremolo...

the speakers and cabinet designs, one surprising omission from both pedals is any kind of speaker/cabinet simulation or provision for direct recording: they are designed to be used in front of a conventional amp, in the conventional manner.

Sounds

Let's start with the FBM-1 '59 Bassman. Plugging in to a fairly revealing and harsh clean tone from a transistor amp might seem like an unfair test for the '59 Bassman pedal. Yet as you kick in the little beast, you have to raise a wry smile at how Roland has captured a dollop of the living, breathing amp's tone curve and character with its COSM technology. If you've had the pleasure of playing the real thing you'll know that there's not much gain at lower volumes, which can be frustrating, but this is where the pedal helps. It's a mid-rich, tweed-type clip and, interestingly, responds naturally to whatever guitar you plug in, unlike some digital modelling devices that tend to iron out the idiosyncrasies of different instruments. The bright input is a boon too,

imparting extra sparkle that helps no end with a sense of real-ness and presence. Pushed to the limits and exploring the full range of picking textures, there are clearly shortfalls in terms of the ultimate dynamic range, headroom and touch sensitivity of a singing Bassman, lest we pretend that any pedal or amp simulator can really deliver that. Remember that a real '59 Bassman pumps out around 50 watts through four 10-inch speakers housed in a pine box: it's as much a physical experience as a tonal one when playing an amp like that. And will it help a 1970s master volume Marshall turn in a convincing Fender sound? Come on – this is digital modelling, not magic. Nevertheless, plugged into any decent amp and used as a Fender-flavoured boost, the FBM-1 turns in a very likeable performance, covering clean-ish country, though grittier rock 'n' roll and on into more driven blues and lighter rock.

The FDR-1 '65 Deluxe Reverb's COSM treatment is no less impressive than the FBM-1's in adding some much needed colour and character to an otherwise unremarkable transistor amp

Plugged into any decent amp and used as a Fender-flavoured boost, the FBM-1 turns in a very likeable performance

clean tone. There's more gain on tap than in the real amp, all of which is available at lower volumes if you want it. The difference in tonality is that the '65 Deluxe Reverb has a smoother distortion than the '59 Bassman – the real Blackface Deluxe has a very sweet 22-watt output stage that overdrives very musically when pushed. It also has a more noticeable dip in the middle frequencies which, as a very general rule, is what you'd expect of Fender's mid-sixties Blackface amps compared with the fifties tweed models. The breaking clean, on-the-edge-of-drive sounds have a good sense of air and response to pick attack that, while not as 'real' as the amp, is nevertheless something that you rarely get from a stompbox.

The included digital reverb here is voluminous and, to be frank, pretty harsh sounding. Used extremely sparingly though it

The Rivals

FBM-1 '59 Bassman & FDR-1 '65 Deluxe Reverb

Stompboxes that mimic single amplifiers directly are pretty thin on the ground. **Award-Session's JD10 MkII** (£99) is a 100 per cent analogue pedal that aims tonally for the "classic 4 x 10 combos of the 1950s and 1960s", albeit with tons more gain if you want it. It has speaker simulation and an XLR out too. The **Tech 21 SansAmp GT2** (£100) has selections derived from Fender, Marshall and Boogie, plus three 'mod' (drive) and three simulated mic positions, for a 27-way matrix of sounds. Then there's the whole gamut of digital modelling devices, but that's getting away from the format of these pedals.



The Bassman features a Bright input

There's more gain on tap with the FDR-1 than in the real amp, all of which is available at lower volumes if you want it

gives a taste of that spring reverb flavour so beloved of classic Fender amps, but higher settings sound completely unnatural compared with the real thing.

Confusion with the terms vibrato and tremolo abound here. Not only does Fender call the Strat's wang-bar a tremolo (it's a vibrato!), but the vibrato effect in the '65 Deluxe Reverb is in fact tremolo: it varies in volume, not pitch. Much easier to get your head around is that the intensity ranges from barely audible to a sharp, on/off staccato pulse, and you can alter the rate of the pulse by holding down the pedal for two seconds then tapping in the tempo with your foot. Hold it for another two seconds and the new rate is set. That drummer who plays faster at gigs than in rehearsals? You've got 'im covered.

Verdict

With the combined clout of BOSS and Fender, this was destined to be a new direction for stompers. Nobody should be fooled in a straight A/B listening test with the real amps at volume, but the real world appeal lies in the fact these pedals provide a decent flavour of their namesakes at achievable volumes. A significant omission is any speaker or cabinet modelling for direct recording: it seems like a no-brainer on digital pedals like these. That said, how



many of us would have actually used it?

So, which to buy? The Deluxe may prove more popular as it has smoother drive and the added reverb and tremolo effects. Make sure you try them both though – we can't wait to see where BOSS (and Fender) goes next. 📍

The bottom line

FBM-1 '59 Bassman

We like: Good tone; adjustable gain level; looks ace

We dislike: No speaker/cabinet simulation

Guitarist says: A unique route to low- and medium-gain sounds

FDR-1 '65 Deluxe Reverb-Amp

We like: Smooth overdrive; tremolo effect is good fun

We dislike: Reverb unconvincing

Guitarist says: A capable stomper for sixties-era Fender drive tones

BOSS Legend Series FBM-1 '59 Bassman

Price: £116

Origin: Taiwan

Type: Digital amp simulation pedal

Programmable: No

Controls: Presence/middle, gain/level (dual-concentric pots), bass, treble

Connections: 6.4mm jacks; input and 'bright' input, output. Barrel-style jack for power adaptor

Other features: None

Power: Single nine-volt PP3 battery, or BOSS nine-volt AC PSA240 adaptor (not included)

Options: None

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Test results

Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★☆
Sound	★★★★☆
Value for money	★★★★☆

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

BOSS Legend Series FDR-1 '65 Deluxe Reverb-Amp

Price: £116

Origin: Taiwan

Type: Digital amp simulation pedal

Programmable: No

Controls: Gain/level, vibrato/reverb (dual-concentric pots), bass, treble

Connections: 6.4mm jacks; input and output. Barrel-style jack for power adaptor

Other features: None

Power: Single nine-volt PP3 battery, or BOSS nine-volt AC PSA240 adaptor (not included)

Options: None

Test results

Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★☆
Sound	★★★★☆
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GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★