

Rocked & Rated



Rainger Dr
Freakenstein

MXR
FullBore
Metal



Group Test

Dedicated Distortion For Your Pedalboard

Roger Mayer
Metalloid



ProTone
Skumstörtion



Flip the page to
find out which one
won our Group Test
head-to-head

WORDS HENRY YATES

London, England, 1964. A part-time inventor named Roger Mayer gives a prototype fuzz pedal to an up-and-coming session man called Jimmy Page, and in doing so, transforms the sound of rock 'n' roll from twangy and twee to filthy and furious. Mayer's fuzzbox might not have been quite the first, but the prolific work of his big-name clients – Page, Jeff Beck, Big Jim Sullivan – ensured the sound got everywhere, and by the time Keith Richards clattered through the 1965 smash (*I Can't Get No*) *Satisfaction*, the revolution was on.

Distortion is always the first effect on our shopping list (aka 'overdrive', 'fuzz' or simply 'filth') and our love affair with it shows no sign of cooling. But these days, it takes different forms. Putting aside the fact that even basic amps are capable of distortion, the rise of multi-fx and modelling units like the Line 6 POD mean that a standalone stompbox has to be bloody good to justify its relative expense. But then, you only have to check out the pedalboards of the stars to appreciate that dedicated pedals still very much have a place.

Would you seriously consider buying a compression pedal when you could blow the roof off with one of these? First up is ProTone's Skumstörtion (£129), followed by the bonkers Dr Freakenstein Fuzz (£249) from UK newcomers Rainger. We've got the compact FullBore Metal (£149) from effects guru MXR, and the long-awaited return of Mr FX himself, with the new Roger Mayer Metalloid (£215). This *will* get loud. ■

**"A STANDALONE DISTORTION
HAS TO BE BLOODY GOOD TO
JUSTIFY ITS EXPENSE"**

Why should your hands have all the fun? This month, **TG stomps on four of the hottest new distortion pedals in fuzzland** to see which one belongs in your gigbag



ProTone Skumstortion

£129

Pedal to the metal

Chassis
The metal chassis is hand-built in the US and solid as a rock



Dials
We've seen more buttons, but minimalist is good when you're onstage

LED
Stomp the switch and a green LED confirms the unit is on – great for live

Like pedals of yore, the Skumstortion has one effect and minimal knobs, so it'll live or die on the class of its distortion. ProTone is confident, citing the "wicked high-gain sustain that can rival a stack of amps", and promising "from screaming leads to rhythm work, it delivers the goods".

So you clock the rotting skull on the Skumstortion's bulletproof chassis and you think, "This is going to be mental!" And it kinda is. Set the Drive and Tone at two-thirds, stomp the footswitch,



and you get a really brittle, biting attack that's totally satisfying for old-school metal, giving good note articulation and enough low end to shake the ceiling.

Many rockers will happily stick there, and their £129 will be

well-spent. But when the hairier contingent crank the Drive to the max on the hunt for savage, modern, Mesa-style filth, they'll get diminishing returns, with the Skumstortion never quite going as crazy as its blurb suggests. Or maybe our ears are just desensitised after all these years.

Conclusion: The ProTone Skumstortion might beat the hell out of your amp's distortion channel, but in the bearpit of the pedal market, it's perhaps best described as a 'solid choice', not

a life-changing one. With that said, it's the cheapest in this Group Test, perhaps the most roadworthy (the hand-made US chassis is built like a Sherman tank), and certainly the least fussy, and would therefore make a great first choice for rockers with gigs booked. But don't blow your wad just yet...

SUMMARY
For: Tough, simple, great rock sound
Against: Not as crazy as we'd like
★★★★☆

TG says: The Skum is great fun

Rainger Dr Freakenstein Fuzz

£249

It's alive!

Switch
The unit comes alive with a hand-operated 'knife switch': not ideal for gigs



Osc
Mad effects and monster sustain abound as you cycle through the oscillator dial...

Mod
...or you can activate the Mod switch for hands-free sweeping through the Osc

David Rainger has created a monster. "It's a very distinct type of distortion," says the London-based boffin, and he ain't kidding. Operated by hand (but sold with a foot-activated pressure pad known as Igor), it uses 'oscillator synchronisation'. This basically gives monster sustain and freaky harmonics based on the notes you play and the position of the Osc dial.

Start off with the Osc full up and you've got the most



traditional tone, and even that is bonkers: a fuzzed-up, raggedy-arsed, sustain-mungous, Matt Bellamy-style grind that's best for single notes and can be 'killed' on a sixpence with the

noise gate. Spin the Osc and things get weirder as the unit adds harmonics, while using the Mod and Rate dials to automatically sweep the Osc is more divisive, like a wah, phaser and synth being abused.

The Igor pad is a cool touch but its fiddly size (plus the fragile main unit) suggests it's one for studio boffins, not road warriors.

Conclusion: Tough one, this. TG would love to give this pedal an unreserved thumbs-up. In a

world of identikit stompboxes, it made us grin and – with a bit of tweaking – gave us some mind-blowing effects. But if you're a cash-strapped covers band in need of a no-nonsense filthbox for club circuit gigs, you'll be back at the shop in the morning with the receipt. Your choice.

SUMMARY
For: Unique, memorable, bonkers
Against: Too off-the-wall for some
★★★★☆

TG says: Freak or unique?

"THE MXR FULLBORE METAL IS 'JUST' A DISTORTION PEDAL BUT IT'S DONE TO NEAR-PERFECTION"

DEDICATED DISTORTION PEDALS **★ GROUP TEST**

MXR FullBore Metal £149

The drive of your life

Gate ■ The noise gate is a great feature for ironing out squeals and scrapes

Chassis ■ Tough and compact, the FullBore is a touring rocker's best friend



'Scoop' button ■ Become James Hetfield at the touch of this button, which scoops the mid

At a glance

MXR FullBore Metal

TYPE: Distortion pedal
EFFECTS: Distortion
CONTROLS: Volume, Frequency, Gain, Low, Mid, High, Gate, Scoop
SOCKETS: Input, output, power
POWER: 9V battery or 9V DC connector
CONTACT: JHS 01132 865381
WEB: www.jimdunlop.com

Back to sanity, then, with the FullBore Metal: a chunky little housebrick at which you wouldn't look twice if it didn't have those three magic letters – 'MXR' – on its chassis. The FX legend is touting "ultimate riff power" and "devastating contemporary metal tones" this time, from a stompbox that will "turbo-charge your guitar with ultra high-gain".

OK, so the FullBore is 'just' a distortion pedal, but it's done to near-perfection. Fat and full at low gain, pushing the dial makes



this pedal turn seriously nasty, with a saturated, jaw-breaking bark that punches holes in the mix and makes its rivals seem just a little polite by comparison.

Tonally, it's your dream ticket for modern metal, and that's

consolidated by the brilliant trimmings, with a scoop switch that instantly trims the fat from your tone, Metallica-style, and an optional noise gate that kills anything below a set volume (although you'll need to disable it for more subtle play). It's also the only one with a three-band EQ, and the most compact, which matters on the road.

Conclusion: Read no further, gigging metallers, for this is your filth pedal. There's enough tweakability to hold your

interest and with bone-snapping aggression, this is worthy of a slot on anyone's pedalboard. In fact, the only sticking point here is the price. With the street price on the also-great Boss Metal Zone coming in at around £70, MXR might have misjudged the depth of our pockets. The advice, as ever, is to stomp it and see.

SUMMARY

For: Compact, versatile, psychotic
Against: Pricy for 'just' a pedal

★★★★☆

TG says: It's a wild Bore

Roger Mayer Metalloid £215

Step on it!

'Mix' dial ■ Once you've tailored your tones, you can decide which is loudest in the mix

Main dials ■ The Metalloid gives serious control over the high and low end of your tone



Battery ■ Ditch the screwdriver: just replace the battery by sliding across the front panel

At a glance

Roger Mayer Metalloid

TYPE: Dual-band distortion pedal
EFFECTS: Distortion
CONTROLS: Drive/EQ for Low/High bands, Mix, Output
SOCKETS: Input, 3x outputs, power
POWER: 9V battery or 9V DC adaptor
CONTACT: Chris Bryant's 0207 836 4723
WEB: www.roger-mayer.co.uk

Roger Mayer is not happy. "I'm bored of everyone making Tube Screamer copies," he tells TG. The solution, he says, is the Metalloid, a dual-band parallel distortion with individual control over your axe's high and low frequencies. "In the studio, it's common to build a guitar tone with parallel sounds," he says. "I thought, 'Let's bring that to the floor!'"

Why hasn't anyone done this before? The Metalloid is dead simple in use, with dedicated



Gain and EQ for each band allowing unprecedented fine-tuning. Cut the Low Gain while cranking the High and you've got a tight, warm chug on the bass strings, and a simultaneously

searing, gravelly bite for solos. Reverse that for a fuzztastic rhythm crunch, fused to crystalline highs.

There are more aggressive pedal tones out there, but the Metalloid is pure old-school quality – a characterful, complex, valve-like distortion that sounds like rock's back pages.

Conclusion: Despite our frothing, the Metalloid is not for everyone. Players who just want to get on with it will balk

at the price tag, shrug at the tone-splitting technology, and pick up the MXR instead. But if you're a genuine tonehead, this groundbreaking product should already have pricked up your ears. 40-odd years after his first fuzz, the world is still playing catch-up with Roger Mayer.

SUMMARY

For: Genius technology that works
Against: Expensive, not for everyone

★★★★★

TG says: Return of the king