

VS

FENDER
MUSTANG
FLOOR VS
ZOOM G5TG hits the deck with a multi-fx face-off and
decides which deserves a good kicking

Words: Henry Yates

ONE pedal that can do everything? To the gearheads of yesteryear, it sounded like black magic, and in the early days of the multi-fx, the reality didn't quite deliver. Typically snapped up by the skint schoolboy who couldn't afford to pick-and-mix Boss stompboxes, early units were the gear equivalent of a Swiss Army knife, packing in 12 dodgy distortions, eight duff delays, two wonky wahs and a feeble flange: good enough to battle through a gig in the school sports hall, perhaps, but nothing to give Roger Mayer sleepless nights.

But the multi-fx concept evolved. Not only is the top-dollar Fractal Axe-Fx processor in the rack of every superstar these days, but even at

street level, modern floor units have palpably upped their game, firing more innovation into the spec sheet, yet remaining hugely cheaper than a trolley-dash through the Dunlop showroom.

In evidence, we present the Fender Mustang Floor (£298) and Zoom G5 (£259): two multi-fx units that smack of aspiration, not desperation. These aren't just glorified filthboxes riding above their station; they purport to be amp-modellers, stompbox-emulators, USB interfaces, preamps, live weapons and studio tone-shapers, touting both quality and quantity at sub-£300 prices. Fender is the more legendary brand, but Zoom has the form in the effects market, making this a battle that could go to the wire.





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FENDER MUSTANG FLOOR £298

Fender hits the deck, but are we floored?

SUMMARY	FEATURES	SOUND QUALITY	VALUE FOR MONEY	BUILD QUALITY	USEABILITY	OVERALL RATING
						★★★★

LIKE King Midas, every market sector that Fender touches turns to gold. The US heavyweight's guitars and valve amps are beyond reproach, but the recent range of Mustang modeller amps has also been well received, and this on-the-deck equivalent promises "pro-level amp modelling and effects... you do not need to be a tech expert!"

Fender stresses this £298 unit is not merely an overgrown stomper, but rather a tone-shaping powerhouse that delivers in all possible scenarios. For live, you've got the chunky chassis, nine footswitches, useful expression pedal and Line Out to run direct to the PA. For studio-heads, it's an über-preamp, with a solid selection of 12 amp models (from Fender's own '59 Bassman to a modern Mesa/Boogie), 37 effects and 100 preset patches (ready-to-go tones

AT A GLANCE

TYPE: Modelling multi-fx
EFFECTS: 12 amp models, 37 effects, 100 onboard presets
CONTROLS: 9x footswitches, 9x editing buttons, data wheel, expression pedal, level, power
SOCKETS: Power, MIDI In/Out, expression pedal (sold separately), USB, L/R unbalanced out, phones socket, aux in, FX Send/Return, guitar input
POWER: PSU (included)
CONTACT: Fender GBI 01342 331700 www.fender.co.uk

built up from the aforementioned amp and effects models): all infinitely tweakable via dash buttons and backlit screen, or with free Fuse software if you want to go deeper. The third scenario, friendless practice, is unlocked by headphone and MP3 sockets. On paper, all the bases are covered.

There's a tendency to number-crunch when it comes to multi-fx units, but while the Mustang is trailing the G5 in quantity, we're more concerned with quality. Fender doesn't yet have, say, Line 6's reputation for nail-on-head simulation, and the Mustang doesn't quite change our opinion, but there's enough faux-valve brilliance to make this a killer straight-to-the-desk studio weapon.

Fender isn't specifying brands, but it's pretty clear we've got the glassy sparkle of a classic Vox and the full-bore, frayed-edge warmth of an old-school Marshall. Fender's own models are the pick of the

bunch, meanwhile, with the '65 Twin Reverb setting so responsive to dynamics that it'll have you tin-opening the unit in search of valves. This is modelling done really well.

The winner? Very close, but no cigar. The Mustang is certainly intuitive when it's sat on your desk, with the chunky data wheel cycling through the endless presets and push/pulling to fine-tune parameters on the virtual amps and stompboxes. But to our minds, this unit doesn't match the G5 when it comes to instinctive,

real-time tweaking on a darkened stage, with the single LCD screen sometimes leaving us a little confused as to where we're at, and on-the-hoof adjustments requiring several button-presses that you may not have time for when you're stood in front of a chanting crowd.

That's not to say the Mustang isn't good live – it most definitely is – but as we'll see in a moment, it doesn't quite match the pedalboard vibe and functionality of the Zoom. Throw in the fact that it's £40 pricier, and the mighty 'F' has been pipped to the post.



The Mustang Floor's single LCD screen displays all of the effects parameters

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ZOOM G5 £259

Zoom's virtual pedalboard finds the G-spot

WHILE it's fair to say that Zoom does not give one solitary toss about anything except effects, the Japanese firm's bloody-minded obsession pays off with the new G5. It's marketed as 'The Answer', which sounds smug, but turns out to be accurate, with even the Mustang's spec sheet pipped by the G5's exhaustive features. You've got all the stuff you had before, but here the standard amp/effects models are given added credibility by a real 12AX7 valve, activated by a boost switch, as well as an onboard looper and jam-along drumbeats.

But for all these trimmings, perhaps the most immediate draw of the Zoom is that in operation the format mirrors an old-school pedalboard. If it helps, you can think of the G5 as being split into four virtual stompboxes, each

with its own footswitch, dials and LCD screen. You can line up, for example, an overdrive, compression, chorus and wah, add or bypass them in the mix, and change the parameters on-the-fly

with a dedicated screen to always keep you in the loop. Luddites will love it.

Admittedly, while you can add up to nine stompboxes to this virtual signal chain, only four are visible, meaning you have to stop playing, bend down and hammer on the 'Scroll' button to view the others. To move between preset banks also necessitates clunking two footswitches at once with your boot (which is actually trickier than it sounds).

Despite these niggles, the G5 feels like a far more immediate format for live work, and that's an impression consolidated by the looper – a cool little feature that lets you bottle

60 seconds of backing – as well as the Z-pedal's four-way rocker movement. It's just a shame the drum rhythms turn out to be rather puny patters.

Still, the meat of the G5 is the amp/effects simulations, and these, combined with the unit's ease of use, proved enough to clinch our Head To Head review. There's not a whole lot between the G5 and Mustang tonally: they both simulate the same sort of iconic vintage valvers, and do it extremely well, with our favourites here the woolly crunch of a '59

Plexi and the hellish scream of a Dual Rectifier. What swung it for these ears was the G5's engaged tube boost, with the 12AX7 adding just a little more hair, sawdust and gravel into the mix.

So it sounds great, operates like a breeze, is stuffed to the gunnels with toys and even fits in a gigbag. All of these factors, along with the very competitive £259 price, mean the Zoom G5 sneaks gold by a wafer-thin margin. If you still think of multi-fx units as the preserve of schoolboys, maybe you should stomp it and see.

AT A GLANCE

TYPE: Modelling multi-fx
EFFECTS: 22 amp models, 120 stompbox models
CONTROLS: 4x footswitches, 1x Tube Booster footswitch, 3x parameter knobs, Type keys and Page keys per footswitch, Scroll, Patch Select, Tap, Rhythm, Total, Store/Swap, Global, Boost, Tone, expression pedal, power, active/passive selector
SOCKETS: Input, output, phones, balanced out, control in, USB
POWER: PSU (included)
CONTACT: Zoom UK
 01462 791100 www.zoom.co.jp

SUMMARY	FEATURES	SOUND QUALITY	VALUE FOR MONEY	BUILD QUALITY	USEABILITY	OVERALL RATING
						★★★★★



There are four LCD screens, one for each 'virtual stompbox'