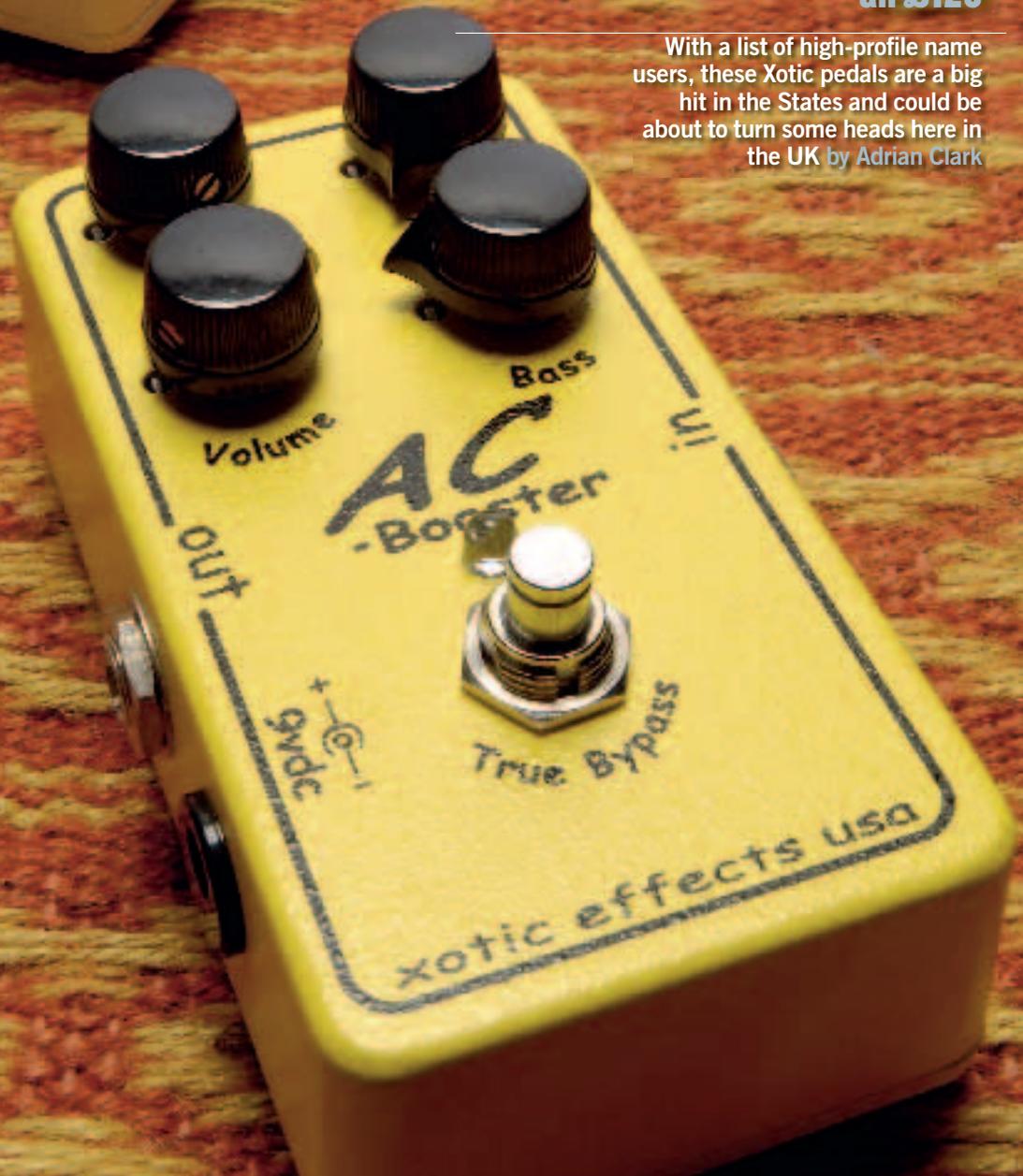




Xotic RC Booster, AC Booster & BB Preamp pedals

all £129

With a list of high-profile name users, these Xotic pedals are a big hit in the States and could be about to turn some heads here in the UK by Adrian Clark





The AC Booster is designed to push your amp harder in terms of gain than its RC counterpart

XOTIC PEDALS

PRICE: All £129

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Clean boost preamp (BB) and booster/overdrive pedals (AC/RC)

FEATURES: True bypass, active tone controls

CONTROLS: Gain, volume, bass, treble

CONNECTIONS: In, out

MIDI: No

POWER: 9V battery (supplied) or DC adaptor (not supplied)

OPTIONS: None

Sounds Great
0161 436 4799

www.prosoundcommunications.com

Although still relatively unknown here in the UK, Xotic pedals are gradually building a following, largely through word-of-mouth recommendations. In the US, though, these three little boxes have become cult classics, appearing on tons of big-name recordings. A browse of the Xotic website reveals quite a star-studded list of avid users... Scott Henderson, Brad Paisley, Steve Lukather, Allen Hinds and Robben Ford, to name just a few (the website is worth a browse, if only for the generous supply of video clips showing some of the Xotic users in jaw-dropping guitar action). All three stompboxes are now easily available in the UK through Sounds Great in Cheshire, so we can now find out exactly what all the fuss is about...

All three pedals have essentially the same design, apart from their colours. Housed in compact powder-coated die-cast boxes, they're modest but solid looking. All have a single on/off footswitch and controls for gain, volume, treble and bass. The tone controls are active, with detented flat settings at the centre of their sweep. Power is via a nine-volt battery (which it's necessary to remove four screws and the baseplate to access) or a regulated DC power supply, while status is indicated by a bright red LED.

XOTIC RC BOOSTER	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★
<p>■ WE LIKED Crisp, lively tone that's great for single-coils</p> <p>■ WE DISLIKED Nothing – it does its job perfectly</p>	

All very similar on the surface, but how do they sound?

SOUNDS: Of the three, the RC Booster is designed to produce the cleanest, most transparent sound. As Xotic says: "the best characteristic of this booster is to have no character at all." The intention is to increase sustain and enhance the tonal characteristics of the guitar, amp and other effects, but without superimposing any additional qualities. Now, while that might not sound a particularly interesting way to relieve yourself of £129, the reality is a lot more exciting.

Initially setting the tone controls in their neutral centre position, we found that by turning the gain knob down to zero, the volume knob can then be used to add a small amount of clean boost (or cut, if you really need such a thing). Adding the tone controls gives a useful range of quite subtle boost

XOTIC AC BOOSTER	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★
<p>■ WE LIKED Good focused tone for lead guitar</p> <p>■ WE DISLIKED Just a little too mid-range-heavy at times</p>	

effects... this certainly doesn't take advantage of the pedal's full gain range, but sometimes all you need is a slight enhancement to make a sound cut through. With the tone knobs both at 100 per cent the basic amp tone is still almost unaffected, but the sound is much more 'lively', especially on a Strat or Tele, where the naturally more pronounced upper and lower frequencies (and reduced mid-range) are further enhanced by the pedal.

But enough of such modest reserve: winding up the gain control brings the amp to life, and even with the tone controls back in the neutral position, the RC Booster adds an exciting sense of presence and immediacy to the sound. Even at full gain, you're not going to get fire-breathing dual rectifier sounds out of a vintage valve amp, but that's not the point of the RC. It makes your amp do its usual job, but harder and with a smooth overdrive sound. →



The BB Preamp is capable of over 30dB of clean boost

XOTIC BB PREAMP	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WE LIKED Plenty of gain for a number of applications WE DISLIKED A tad bright and harsh at high-gain settings 	

The rivals

Fulltone Fat Boost £179
BOSS SD-1 Overdrive £69
Roger Mayer Concorde+ £135

The Fulltone is a clean boost with similar characteristics to the BB, while Roger Mayer's Concorde+ is a treble booster, covering some of the RC's territory. The AC's tone reminded us a little of the BOSS SD-1, a good example of a good quality big-name pedal which doesn't hurt the wallet too much. From New Zealand, Paul Crowther's Hot Cake (£135) has similar legendary status to the Xotics and acts a little like a higher gain version of the RC Booster

→ With everything turned up full, the sound becomes heavily compressed and 'spongy'. Obviously, these descriptions are dependent on how you set up your basic amp sound; with a Cornford Harlequin set to produce just the slightest break-up with heavy strumming on a Strat, the maxed-out RC Booster is capable of some meaty Hendrix-style sustain sounds.

Although the AC Booster has the same range of controls on offer as the RC Booster, it's designed to push your amp a lot harder – supposedly adding enough gain to work as a distortion pedal. Starting with the same basic settings as before (gain on zero, tone controls neutral) we noticed that the AC was slightly warmer and less bright than the basic amp tone, whereas the RC was very similar to the bypassed tone. Once again, the volume and treble/bass controls can be used to provide a variety of clean boosts, but with this slightly warmer, fatter tone. The AC has a less immediate attack and the low

Coupled with an already overdriven basic amp sound, the AC Booster is capable of some fantastic old-style fuzz sustain

end is not quite as tight as on the RC.

Pushing up the gain, it's apparent that the AC has much more of a mid-range-heavy tone than the RC, which may make it more suitable for lead applications. Even at full gain/volume, it doesn't have all that much more drive than the RC, but the sound is more focused in the mid-range, which helps with lead tones. Pushing up the tone controls adds more tonal breadth and presence, also adding to the amount of drive. At these higher settings, the AC adds some nice natural compression to the sound and, coupled with an already overdriven basic amp sound, it's capable of some fantastic old-style fuzz sustain. In fact, we thought it worked better overall when the amp sound was slightly overdriven.

As the name suggests, the BB Preamp has a different purpose from the other two Xotic pedals. It's capable of over 30dB of clean boost, along with the two-band active EQ controls found on the other pedals.

Starting again with our clean settings, we noticed that the BB needed a little extra boost to the volume knob (to about 55 per cent) in order to match the clean amp sound. This done, its basic sound turned out to be less crisp and bright than the RC; there's a slight loss of top end, along with a hint of compression, even at this

clean setting. Boosting the tone controls produces similar results to the RC, although the BB has less 'spank' and a lot more low-end.

Once again, we can use the volume control for a range of clean boosts, and the BB has much more scope here than the other pedals, adding a thick, slightly mid-rangey kick to the amp's front end. The real strength lies in the gain control, where there's much more scope for overdrive than with the other two pedals. At high levels, the BB can push even the politest amp into serious overdrive. Compared to the AC Booster, the high gain sounds are brighter and less compressed; in this sense, the tone resembles that of the RC Booster. The brightness may be too bright for some, but the tone controls are powerful enough to deal with that.

Verdict

It's easy to see why the Xotic pedals have become such a hit with a range of guitar luminaries. They don't do anything particularly dramatic, but they do their simple overdrive and tone-shaping jobs effectively. Thanks to the favourable exchange rate, they're also a lot cheaper than many other hand-made stompboxes; \$129 is not a lot to pay for a pedal from a small manufacturer these days. Although the three pedals all do similar jobs, you'd really need to spend time with each one before deciding. Each can perform a distinct role in your tonal palette, but whichever one you go for, you're guaranteed a great tone! 

Xotic RC Booster

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

Xotic AC Booster

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

Xotic BB Preamp

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★