

ZVEX DISTORTRON & MASTOTRON £99 EACH
EFFECTS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVE CAUDREY



ZVex Distortron & Mastotron £99 each

Two very versatile distortion and fuzz stompboxes from Minneapolis - it's tone to the bone! *by Simon Bradley*

These two new boxes are part of ZVex's Vextron Series and include the Distortron - an overdrive designed, so says ZVex head honcho Zachary Vex, to "simulate the everything-on-10 sound of a classic Marshall JTM45", and the Mastotron - a "heavy silicon fuzz design with a couple of unusual features".

A feature common to both is the three-way Subs switch, intended to offer increasingly dense levels of low-end. The Distortron is closely linked to the Box Of Rock - ZVex's first real distortion pedal - and the three Subs selections mirror the tones available on that unit. The operations of those on the Mastotron, however, are more straightforward, giving three selections of frankly obscene bass for you to play with.

The Distortron also has a two-way gain switch, and there's a hint of ZVex's legendary humour associated with the Drive pot: around the circumference of the knob it says 'crackle okay', indicating that it's alright if the pot makes extraneous noise! The circuit is based on the Super Hard-On, a preamp pedal designed to recreate the sound of a vintage desk input being beaten to death with a weapon fashioned from purest crackle.

Features included with the Mastotron comprise a Pulse Width control that enables you to regulate the expanse of the fuzz and a Relax/Push pot, which in effect acts as a softening agent to the fuzz. The further towards Push you go, the more raw the signal and therefore the fuzz.

Battery access for both is via the baseplate, and each uses a standard nine-volter.

Sounds

We follow ZVex's advice and set our stock Marshall 2 x 12

The Rivals

A great place to start your fuzz affair is the **BOSS FZ-5** (£89). It offers three models of classic pedals. For a more organic look try the **Electro-Harmonix Big Muff with Wicker** (£72): it's versatile and sounds great. **DigiTech's SC-2 Valve Distortion** (£99) provides a warm and pliable drive from two modes, while the **Vox Satchurator JS-DS** (£85), not only gives you Joe Satriani's tone in a box but is also very useable across many styles.



The Subs switch is a holdover from ZVex's Box Of Rock pedal

The Distortron is better suited to the market at large... It provides many extremely useable levels of distortion

combo to a warm, clean tone and dive in with the Distortron. Aside from sheer volume, the main thing you get from running a JTM45 at full blast is plenty of warm drive and a smooth sustain, something that this pedal recreates admirably.

Using the low gain and Subs 2 settings, you need only dial the Drive to just over half to obtain a lovely crunch that works well with full open chords. For rockier tones, simply flick the gain switch to high and wig out, although beware Subs 3, as proceedings do mush up. But on bass it's a very different story...

We soon find that the trick is to balance the tone pot with the drive value, as use of the former can clean up too much of the latter and, if you set your amp to an AC/DC-style rhythm crunch and use the pedal to add a little heat, the tone is nothing short of wonderful: full of warmth, drive and attack. In short, this is a very versatile and toneful distortion pedal indeed.

We're grateful for the swathe of shaping options that the Mastotron offers, as this is one wild horse of a fuzz. By carefully balancing the Relax/Push, PW and Tone knobs, there truly are a hatful of

sounds on offer and, by adding in increasingly bassy flavours from the Subs switch, you can swim in a flood of soupy drive.

We did find that, unless you get the balancing act just right, notes tend to crash into one another, this is fine if you're not trying to pull off two- or three-string passages: the Subs switch is difficult to get at quickly too as it's almost hidden behind the volume and tone pots. However, setting the PW pot towards the narrow extreme, erring towards Push and using half fuzz, that classic Roobarb And Custard TV show melody is strident and authentic.

You do need to be a certain type of guitarist to get anything out of a genuine fuzz pedal such as this, but the Mastotron provides more than enough options to be getting on with.

Verdict

Although both pedals have been given the same final marks here, there's little doubt that the Distortron is far better suited to the market at large than the Mastotron. It provides many extremely useable levels of distortion that, with a simple flick of the gain switch, can be applied to many styles.

If you're experienced with fuzz, the Mastotron will impress but, if you're attracted to the price and fancy a punt, you'll be required to sit with it until the various intertwined features fall into place.

Is this ZVex's arrival into the mainstream? Well, almost – it certainly seems that the Vextron series has taken the company a giant step closer. **G**

The Bottom Line

ZVex Distortron

We like: Versatile distortion with several features that allow you to obtain great tones very quickly

We dislike: Subs 2 and 3 can be a little overwhelming

Guitarist says: A thoroughly satisfying distortion that deserves to become very popular

ZVex Mastotron

We like: Shaping features; number of tones; the PW and Relax/Push pots

We dislike: Hard to control; the Subs switch is awkward to change on the fly

Guitarist says: This is a fully pro fuzz pedal, which means dollops of organic drive and fizzy treble. Not for everyone, but some will love it.



ZVex Distortron

PRICE: £99

ORIGIN: USA

CONTROLS: Volume, tone and drive pots, with Lo/Hi gain and 2/1/3 Subs switches

CONNECTIONS: Mono input and output jacks

POWER: Nine-volt battery or optional nine-volt PSU

OTHER FEATURES: Drive pot goes between 'crackle' and 'okay'...

OPTIONS: The Box of Rock goes for around £140

Mansons Guitar Shop

01392 496379

www.zvex.com

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



ZVex Mastotron

PRICE: £99

ORIGIN: USA

CONTROLS: Volume, tone, pulse width, fuzz and relax/push controls, 2/1/3 Subs switch

CONNECTIONS: Mono input and output jacks

POWER: Nine-volt battery or optional nine-volt PSU

OTHER FEATURES: The PW pot goes between a square and narrow wave

OPTIONS: The Fuzz Factory retails at around £175

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Balancing the Relax/Push, PW and Tone knobs is the key to great Mastotron tone