

Fuzztest

You want fuzz? Guitarist selects eight contenders to square off your sound
by Trevor Curwen

PHOTOGRAPHY BY AMANDA THOMAS



Dunlop JH-F1 Jimi Hendrix Fuzz Face

An icon re-issued in authentic form

CONTACT: JHS **PHONE:** 01132 865381 **WEB:** www.jhs.co.uk

Based on the 1969-70 Dallas Arbiter Fuzz Face that Jimi Hendrix used, this modern re-issue accurately recreates the look of that pedal and is built around a pair of BC108 silicon transistors, with hand-wired circuitry carefully matched to the original specs.

Sounds

The Hendrix edition has the vintage Fuzz Face sound down. With a bright tonality that cuts through, this is a smooth fuzz that oozes sustain and cleans up quite nicely when you roll your volume back

Verdict

An iconic stompbox. Great if you want to look the part as well as sound it, but it's not the most practical of pedals.

Spec

PRICE: £229
ORIGIN: USA
FEATURES: BC108 Silicon transistors
CONTROLS: Volume, fuzz
CONNECTIONS: Input, output
POWER: 9V battery
DIMENSIONS: 180 (diameter) x 50mm (h)
RANGE OPTIONS: JHF2 Fuzz Face £169

The Bottom Line

We like: Cool looks; authentic vintage sound
We dislike: Expensive; fiddly battery access; no LED; no power adaptor socket

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Voodoo Lab Superfuzz

Vintage fuzz with tweakable tone options

CONTACT: Sounds Great Music **PHONE:** 0161 436 4799 **WEB:** www.soundsgreatmusic.com

The Superfuzz is based on the rare Jordan Electronics Bosstone from 1968, but adds unique tone and resonance circuits to take the sound further.

Sounds

Designed to provide a variety of both vintage and modern tones, the Superfuzz does just that. You can dial in a nice dose of buzzy, raspy fuzz typical of sixties US garage and psych. But with a Resonance control that beefs up the bottom end and a Tone control that can scoop out the mid-range or boost it to honkiness, there's plenty of variation on tap.

Verdict

It's a fuzz with more available tonal tweaking than most.

Spec

PRICE: £129
ORIGIN: USA
FEATURES: LED
CONTROLS: Volume, resonance, tone, attack
CONNECTIONS: Input, output
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) or 9V battery
DIMENSIONS: 124 (l) x 95 (w) x 55mm (h)
RANGE OPTIONS: Proctavia fuzz/octave pedal (£119)

The Bottom Line

We like: Range of vintage and modern sounds
We dislike: Four screws for battery access

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Gary Hurst Tonebender

Guitarist CHOICE

A re-issue of the first great British fuzz

CONTACT: JMI PHONE: 0113 243 8165 WEB: www.jmiamplification.com

As our feature (see p62) explains, Hurst designed one of the very first British fuzzboxes, the Tonebender, back in 1965. This is an accurate reproduction of the original metal cased Mk I, endorsed and signed by Gary, and hand-built by JMI in a limited run of 50.

Sounds

With three Germanium transistors doing the business, this is a real mid-sixties vintage fuzz that hits the tonal spot just right – fat, rich and detailed, with bags of sweet sustain – making you want to turn the knobs up and play.

Verdict

It's got that sound, and it's a collector's item – invest in one if you can afford it!

Spec

PRICE: £275
ORIGIN: UK
FEATURES: One OC75 and two Texas Instruments 2G381 Germanium transistors
CONTROLS: Level, attack
CONNECTIONS: Input, output
POWER: 9V battery
DIMENSIONS: 207 (l) x 105 (w) x 77mm (h)
RANGE OPTIONS: Mk II Tonebender (£195), Supafuzz (£195)

The Bottom Line

We like: Authentic vintage fuzz sound
We dislike: Expensive; no power adaptor socket; no LED

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Roger Mayer Voodoo Axe

Guitarist CHOICE

The Hendrix fuzz tone, but tweaked

CONTACT: Roger Mayer PHONE: 0208 330 4700 WEB: www.roger-mayer.co.uk

Roger Mayer was Hendrix's effects guru and his Axis Fuzz was developed in 1967 to give Jimi an additional series of tonal colours. The Voodoo Axe's starting point is the Axis, but it features tonal tweaks to suit modern music styles.

Sounds

This is a classic tactile fuzz with loads of sustain and good note articulation. There's plenty of gain for boosting an amp and a useful tonal range, with a Fatness control that tightens up the bottom end, sounding great on lower string riffage and dropped tunings.

Verdict

A very classily engineered pedal with a very usable range of sounds.

Spec

PRICE: £200
ORIGIN: UK
FEATURES: Silicon transistors, Hard Wire and Dual Buffered outputs, LED
CONTROLS: Drive, fatness, output
CONNECTIONS: Input, HW out1, BF out2, BF out3
POWER: 9V DC adaptor or 9V battery
DIMENSIONS: 112 (l) x 170 (w) x 57 (h)
RANGE OPTIONS: Classic-X, Stone-X, Mongoose-X, Axis Fuzz, Classic Fuzz, Mongoose, Stone (all £200)

The Bottom Line

We like: Build; tonal range; easy battery access
We dislike: Size and shape might be an issue for some

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★ >

FUZZ PEDALS £59-£275
EFFECTS



Electro-Harmonix Little Big Muff Pi

A classic gets smaller for your convenience

CONTACT: Sounds Great Music **PHONE:** 0161 436 4799 **WEB:** www.soundsgreatmusic.com

The Big Muff has achieved legendary status in some circles but it was always a big cumbersome box underfoot, so Electro-Harmonix has fitted the circuitry into a smaller case.

Sounds

E-HX doesn't call it a fuzzbox but a distortion/sustainer, and there's certainly bags of both distortion and sustain here. There's plenty of gain to drive an amp hard, but the key control is the tone knob, with a wide range that will take you from bright edgy fuzz to creamy-smooth liquid sustain and all stations in-between.

Verdict

It's a classic Big Muff, but in a more manageable form. What's not to like?

Spec

PRICE: £59
ORIGIN: USA
FEATURES: LED
CONTROLS: Volume, tone, sustain
CONNECTIONS: Input, output
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) or 9V battery
DIMENSIONS: 119 (l) x 102 (w) x 60mm (h)
RANGE OPTIONS: Big Muff Pi (£59), Big Muff with Tone Wicker (£69), Double Muff (£39)

The Bottom Line

We like: Versatile range of tones; compact size
We dislike: Four screws for battery access

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

ZVex Fuzz Factory

Fuzz on an industrial scale!

CONTACT: Manson's Guitar Shop **PHONE:** 01392 496379 **WEB:** www.mansons.co.uk

Although it makes use of two highly prized New Old Stock sixties Germanium transistors, the Fuzz Factory isn't a revamp of any classic fuzz pedal design. Instead what you get is a wild beast of a fuzzbox with five knobs to tame it (or not!).

Sounds

While it can still amply do the conventional thing with harmonically rich edgy fuzz, the Fuzz Factory's true forté is unbridled sonic terrorism, with staccato-gated fuzz, squeals, howls and resonant droning feedback that you can tune to pitch. Very cool.

Verdict

The ideal tool for the sort of a player who is on his knees at the end of the set manipulating knobs to create a cacophony.

Spec

PRICE: £199
ORIGIN: USA
FEATURES: Two NOS Germanium transistors, LED
CONTROLS: Volume, gate, compress, drive, stability
CONNECTIONS: Input, output
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) or 9V battery
DIMENSIONS: 62 (l) x 120 (w) x 50mm (h)
RANGE OPTIONS: Vexer Fuzz Factory (£129)

The Bottom Line

We like: Versatile; capable of sounding out of control
We dislike: Careful knob positioning is required

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



FUZZ PEDALS £59-£275
EFFECTS



BOSS FZ-5

Staple sixties sounds modelled

CONTACT: Roland UK PHONE: 01792 702701 WEB: www.roland.co.uk

The FZ-5 uses COSM modelling to recreate three classic sixties stompboxes: an early Germanium-transistor Fuzz Face, a Maestro FZ-1A and an Octavia.

Sounds

There's plenty of gain available and setting the Fuzz knob past 12 o'clock boosts the distortion to higher levels than the originals were capable of. The Fuzz Face model sounds pretty authentic, albeit a little less rich sounding and responsive than the real deal, while the Octavia offers a useful extra dimension to single notes. The Maestro flies the flag for cheesy fuzz – all farty and trebly.

Verdict

Three quite different fuzz sounds in one pedal for the budget-conscious.

Spec

PRICE: £95
ORIGIN: Taiwan
FEATURES: Maestro FZ-1A, Fuzz Face, and Octavia models
CONTROLS: Level, mode (three-way selector switch), fuzz
CONNECTIONS: Input, output
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) or 9V battery
DIMENSIONS: 129 (l) x 73 (w) x 59mm (h)
RANGE OPTIONS: None

The Bottom Line

We like: Build; compact size; three sounds in one box
We dislike: Modelling doesn't totally capture the vibe of the real thing

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

MXR Classic 108 Fuzz

It's a Fuzz Face, Jimi, but not as we know it...

CONTACT: JHS PHONE: 01132 865 381 WEB: www.jhs.co.uk, www.jimdunlop.com

Great sound, shame about the practicality – that's the Fuzz Face to a tee. So, Dunlop has transplanted its re-issue BC-108-loaded Fuzz Face circuitry into a more user-friendly setting – a box that will slot comfortably onto a pedalboard with easy battery access, mains adaptor operation and an LED.

Sounds

Tonally, it's pretty much the same as the Jimi Hendrix model but with a touch more gain. The Buffer switch is there to eliminate audible oscillation caused when some wahs are placed in front of a Fuzz Face, but also adds brightness should you want it.

Verdict

A Fuzz Face brought right up to date. Excellent. **G**

Spec

PRICE: £199
ORIGIN: USA
FEATURES: BC108 Silicon transistors, LED, buffer
CONTROLS: Volume, fuzz, buffer switch
CONNECTIONS: Input, output
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) or 9V battery
DIMENSIONS: 125 (l) x 94 (w) x 60mm (h)
RANGE OPTIONS: El Grande Bass Fuzz pedal £149

The Bottom Line

We like: Sorts out the impracticalities of a Fuzz Face
We dislike: We'd like it more if it cost less

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★