



Electro-Harmonix Little Big Muff Pi & Metal Muff £52 & £55

Dive into a world of aural pleasure as we treat you to a pair of brand new Muffs with contrasting flavours **by Chris Vinnicombe**

PHOTOGRAPHY JESSE WILD

ELECTRO-HARMONIX LITTLE BIG MUFF PI

PRICE: £52

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Analogue fuzz stompbox

CONTROLS: Sustain, tone, volume

CONNECTIONS: 6.4mm jack instrument input and output

POWER: Nine-volt mains adaptor (not supplied) or one PP3 battery

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: Other fearsome dirtboxes from the Electro-Harmonix stable include the full-size NYC Big Muff Pi (£52), the Double Muff (£44) and the valve-powered Hot Tubes (£122)

CONTACT: Electro-Harmonix products are stocked by a number of UK dealers including

Hot Rox
UK 0115 9873163
www.ehx.com

ELECTRO-HARMONIX METAL MUFF

As Little Big Muff, except...

PRICE: £55

CONTROLS: Volume, top boost, treble, middle, bass, distortion, individual footswitches for effect bypass and top boost on/off

OPTIONS: None

Along with Tube Screamer-style overdrive, fuzz is one of the most common boutique effects, with people prepared to shell out big bucks to tone gurus with the promise of capturing the classic sounds of their heroes in a roadworthy unit. Inevitably, a pedal as iconic as the suggestively monikered Big Muff Pi hasn't escaped its share of high-spec imitators. In recent years, this has often been in response to the inflated price of vintage examples, along with perceived shortcomings in modern reissued pedals. However, two new designs from Electro-Harmonix look set to give lovers of all things fuzzy something to smile about.

Little Big Muff

Since the mid-nineties, two versions of reissued Electro-Harmonix Big Muffs have been widely available: the silver version with its iconic red and black cool-as-funk livery manufactured in New York City, and a slightly cheaper Sovtek pedal manufactured in Russia, with a black powder-coated housing and yellow decals. Although fairly similar-sounding units, the Russian version is generally a little edgier and the NYC model a little smoother.

The key complaints that players have voiced over the last few years about both Muffs revolve around the oversized housings, which command a huge amount of pedalboard real

estate, considering the circuit's relative simplicity, without being the most robust or confidence inspiring when subjected to frequent gigging.

This isn't the first Little Big Muff to appear in the Electro-Harmonix catalogue. A pedal with the same name existed in the late seventies, housed in a Small Clone-sized enclosure, but it featured just a single volume control and a two-way tone slider switch, with a milder level of distortion on tap. With the new Little Big Muff, the Electro-Harmonix design team seems to have listened to what players want, delivering a pedal that promises to address all the issues with the full-size versions, with no compromises in terms of sonic performance.

With regard to power, unlike the full-size models that require an old-school mini-jack adaptor if you want to utilise a nine-volt power supply, the new Little Big Muff has a standard barrel socket, just like a BOSS or DigiTech pedal. Adapting the aesthetic of the full-size NYC version, the Little Big Muff's compact die-cast housing is smart and robust, although lacking an access hatch for battery changes, so you have to unscrew the back. That said, a circuit like this has such a low current draw that batteries tend to

last for quite some time. It's also worth noting for studio use that a Big Muff fitted with a dying battery is capable of spitting out really satisfying lo-fi scuzz.

Metal Muff

Alongside the Little Big Muff, Electro-Harmonix has introduced a brand new addition to the stable in the shape of the Metal Muff, or Metal Muff With Top Boost, to give its full title. Looking all S&M thanks to its spiky take on the classic logo and black and chrome livery, this promises to be the dirtiest Muff yet. Although most players will associate Top Boost with

Vox amplification and all things sixties, in this case, Electro-Harmonix has included the feature with a view to ensuring that those riffs and solos scythe through a dense mesh of dirty rhythm guitar.

Sharing much of the

Little Big Muff's rugged construction, but in a larger case with a pair of footswitches, the Metal Muff is a sturdy beast. The amp-style knurled metal knobs look great, but don't grip the pot shafts quite as tightly as the plastic counterparts found on its sibling. Again, battery access is achieved by removing the four screws that secure the base plate to the housing, and although the Metal Muff has a slightly

Single-coil pickups appeal to the trashier side of the Little Big Muff's nature, while humbuckers deliver the cream



E-H LITTLE BIG MUFF	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

■ **WE LIKED** Textbook Big Muff sound in spades; practical upgrades inspire confidence; smaller footprint

■ **WE DISLIKED** The sound won't appeal to some players

E-H METAL MUFF	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

■ **WE LIKED** Raunchy overdrive to fully saturated filth; top boost really cuts through

■ **WE DISLIKED** Arguably not the first choice for those chugging palm-muted metal rhythms

more complex circuit than the Little Big Muff, we'd still expect the battery life to rival the Duracell Bunny.

SOUNDS: After hooking the dirtboxes up to our Orange stack and engaging the Little Big Muff, it's abundantly clear that fans of subtlety need not apply. If you're familiar with the kind of strident fuzztones that are a huge part of the sounds of Mudhoney, Jack White and Billy Corgan, you know what to expect.

When compared to the contemporary Russian Sovtek and NYC reissue Muffs, the Little Big Muff is voiced somewhere between the two, arguably sounding a little warmer and a touch more retro. The pedal delivers a huge dose of creamy sustain and a dense, sizzling roar that, on its inception way back in 1969, sounded quite unlike any other dirtbox, and which still maintains an instantly recognisable aural signature.

As with all Big Muffs, the tone control's position is critical as it has a vast sweep and thus a huge impact on where the sound sits in the mix, particularly live. A small adjustment either way can throw the sound into relief or suck it all away, so experiment at stage volume to see where the tone best sits in terms of its interaction with your bassist and any other guitarists. As a starting point, try setting the tone and

sustain controls to around two o'clock, add volume to taste, and just try not to grin from ear to ear when you bang out a riff on the low E string.

Single-coil pickups appeal to the trashier side of the Little Big Muff's nature, while humbuckers deliver the cream. Just don't expect any significant degree of transparency or the natural character of your instrument to come through once the sustain control advances over halfway.

One of the great things about a Big Muff is that it usually doesn't matter what other gear you have. Unlike a pedal such as a Tube Screamer that relies on the right combination of guitar and amplifier in order to deliver, the Little Big Muff does the business whether you're playing a £3,000 custom build or a scrag end of plywood with the cheapest of pickups.

Moving on to the Metal Muff, it's quickly apparent that the sweep on the equalisation controls is very broad, with the bass control delivering 14dB of cut and boost, the mid control 15dB and the treble control 10dB. With the tone pots set to zero, there's no sound at all, but that certainly changes as you rotate them clockwise. The distortion level without the Top Boost engaged varies from a raunchy retro drive with just a hint of fuzz around the edges at the

lower reaches of the control's range to full-on, searing distortion.

Although there's tighter bottom-end control than with a regular Big Muff, proceedings can still get pretty messy, and it wouldn't be the first pedal we'd turn to for James Hetfield-style palm-muted rhythm playing. The Metal Muff on full tilt is better suited to J Mascis-style angular lead playing, stoner rock riffing and creating a formidable wall of dirt. Extreme EQ settings yield spitting fuzz and marvellous scratchy lo-fidelity voices that are perfect for enlivening a mix or creating dramatic dynamic changes live. When engaging the Top Boost, be careful of the amount of extra bite it can deliver as things can get pretty searing. Of course, perhaps that's exactly what you want...

Verdict

These new Little Big Muffs give fans of their sound the compact design, sturdiness and sensible power options they've coveted for years. Quite simply, if you like fuzzboxes, this is a high-on essential purchase, even if you already own one of its physically bigger siblings.

The Metal Muff is a somewhat different proposition that may well appeal to alt.rock guitarists and extreme noise terrorists as much as – if not more than – conventional metallers of the old school. That said, if you want to make your solos spit molten attitude and your riffs throttle the audience, give the Metal Muff a spin. Just don't forget those devil horns. 🤘

Electro-Harmonix Little Big Muff Pi

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

Electro-Harmonix Metal Muff

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

The rivals

Behringer VD1 Vintage Distortion	£31
Pro Co Rat 2	£69
Z. Vex Vexter Series Fuzz Factory	£119

Behringer's cheeky Big Muff-inspired VD1 has controls for – you guessed it – level, tone and sustain, along with an obscenely cheap price. The Rat is a versatile dirtbox that everyone should own, and its sonic palette ranges from gritty drive to a full-on square wave fuzz sound all of its own. Finally, the Fuzz Factory is a compendium of killer fuzztones from which you can extract such extremes as woolly retro warmth and self-oscillating imminent amp death