



Words: Ed Mitchell

HOT FUZZ PEDALS

If your distortion tone isn't much cop, it could be time to call in the fuzz



FOR some, fuzz isn't just another guitar effect: it's a religion. The holy relics of this transistor-obsessed sect include proto-punk Link Wray's butchered speaker tone on his 1958 classic *Rumble*; Keith Richard's opening riff on The Rolling Stones' *(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction*, powered by a Maestro FZ-1; and the Count Five's fuzz tone masterpiece, *Psychotic Reaction*. Fuzz isn't just one sound either. The fuzz pedals of the mid-60s were voiced with germanium transistors. They snarled and transformed tired old blues licks into garage rock classics. Then, in the late 60s, manufacturers switched to silicon transistors, which produced a thicker tone. Fuzz

fuelled the transition of blues through white boy blues to the sound of early hard rock and metal, later becoming a key ingredient in the alternative and grunge bands of the 90s.

There's been an explosion of interest in fuzz in the last few years too, with modern disciples such as The Black Keys, Mastodon and Josh Homme of Queens Of The Stone Age all adding a fuzz box to their signal chains. If you want the brontosaurus-sized tone of early Led Zep and Black Sabbath, then a generic metal pedal or multi-effects unit isn't going to cut it. You need a real, honest-to-goodness fuzz box, which brings us to the four examples in this Group Test.

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

DUNLOP JDF2 FUZZ FACE £159

SINCE Arbiter launched the noble Fuzz Face back in 1966, the pedal has been stepped on by the likes of Jimi Hendrix, David Gilmour of Pink Floyd and blues guitarists Philip Sayce and Joe Bonamassa. If you want a late 60s-style silicon-driven fuzz, find yourself a turquoise Dunlop JHF1 Jimi Hendrix Fuzz Face (£209). Our JDF2 Fuzz Face, meanwhile, is a reissue of the earlier red-faced germanium job. While some previous Fuzz Face reissues were tonal disaster areas, the JDF2 pumps out an authentic 60s tone, especially if driven with singlecoil pickups. Don't worry, though, humbuckers work great

too, pulling a fatter synth-like tone from the Fuzz Face.

We find the pedal sounds best with its fuzz control on full – the secret is to use the volume control on your guitar, dropping it a little drastically alters the Fuzz Face's tone. Incidentally, the Fuzz Face

has no provision for a mains adaptor, although many fanatics apparently prefer the sound of a battery-fed fuzz anyway. It's still the cutest looking fuzz pedal we ever did see, but we can't allow ourselves to be swayed by a pretty face. Classic or not, the JDF2 Fuzz Face is a bit overpriced when compared with the hand-built D*A*M Meathead

M-13. Look around, however, and you'll be able to pick one up for a tad under £100. That should put a smile on *your* face.

AT A GLANCE
TYPE: Fuzz pedal
CONTROLS: Volume, fuzz, effect on/off
SOCKETS: Input, output
TRUE BYPASS: Yes
POWER: Battery only
CONTACT: John Hornby
 Skewes 01132 865 381
www.jimdunlop.com

ELECTRO-HARMONIX GERMANIUM 4 BIG MUFF PI £85

ON paper at least, the Germanium 4 Big Muff Pi pretty much had the 'value for money' nod all tied up before we even winkled it from its box. What you're getting here is effectively two pedals – an overdrive and a distortion, each with independent controls – stuffed into one box. You've got to love that. The overdrive section offers the first hint that the Big Muff is ear pleasing in real life too. It has a transparent tone that's not that far removed from a classic Ibanez Tube Screamer, although it's a little more ragged around the edges. The distortion section of this equation offers a decent range of fuzz tones as well.

Both sides of the Big Muff have a dedicated Bias control. Keep this knob turned down low and you get a sweet,

compressed tone; turn the control up, and the overdrive and distortion circuits sound increasingly focused and aggressive. The distortion side's 'Volts' control mimics the stuttering sound of a dying battery. You probably won't use this much, but it's fun for the occasional tweak. The great thing about the Germanium 4 Big Muff Pi is that you can stack the overdrive and distortion circuits. Switch both effects on, crank every control up all the way and rejoice in a thick 70s rock tone. The Electro-Harmonix doesn't quite have what it takes tonally to knock the exalted D*A*M Meathead M-13 off its pedestal, but it is half the price. If you're seeking a good range of overdrive and distortion sounds, you'd do well to try a slice of the Big Muff Pi.



AT A GLANCE
TYPE: Overdrive and distortion pedal
CONTROLS: Overdrive: gain, bias, tone, volume, effect on/off; distortion: gain, bias, volts, volume, effect on/off
SOCKETS: Input, output, power
TRUE BYPASS: Yes
POWER: Battery, PSU (sold separately)
CONTACT: info@ehx.com
www.ehx.com

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



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

D*A*M MEATHEAD M-13 £159

D*A*M (AKA Differential Audio Manifestationz) is a small boutique effects manufacturer based in the rock 'n' roll heartland of, er, South Yorkshire. Helmed by fuzz geek David A Main (initials 'DAM' – hey, wait a minute!) the company hand-builds a range of germanium- and silicon-transistor-driven stompboxes. Our Meathead M-13 is a single control 'silicon fuzz machine'. How much aural pleasure can you possibly extract with one control? Well, as just a few minutes with the Meathead M-13 prove, the simplest pedals can sound the best. The Dirt control gradually increases the volume and intensity of the fuzz tone. Until we plugged in the Meathead, we

were convinced that germanium fuzz was king of the castle. Now, we're torn. The Meathead's silicon-driven old-school rock tone is the balls. It's like early Led Zep, Black Sabbath and, well, you get the idea; the M-13 is versatile. Dropping your guitar's volume knob sucks out some bottom end for more of a 60s garage fuzz tone.

AT A GLANCE

TYPE: Fuzz pedal
CONTROLS: Dirt, effect on/off
SOCKETS: Input, output, power
TRUE BYPASS: Yes
POWER: Battery, PSU (sold separately)
CONTACT: info@stompboxes.co.uk, www.stompboxes.co.uk

£159 is a fair old wedge for a small box with one knob. That's not all you're getting here, though. A real flesh-and-blood bloke armed with a soldering iron hunched over a workbench and built the Meathead M-13 from the best

possible components. If we had to put a price on that attention to detail and the tone it achieves, it wouldn't be as little as £159.

T-REX TONEBUG FUZZ £115

THIS latest addition to the T-Rex ToneBug series offers a range of fuzz tones from the mild to the extreme. Twist the Fuzz knob to its 9 o'clock position for a mid-60s miffed bumblebee tone; at around 12 o'clock, things get a bit snottier, with a reasonably close Stooze's *I Wanna Be Your Dog* punk vibe. Whack the control all the way up and you get an insane saturated sound that you'll find is really only bearable in short bursts.

The 'Bug's voice is further tweakable via the onboard Tone control, making this a pretty versatile little pedal. You might find it a little raucous if you're looking for an early Led Zep rock tone, but 60s obsessed garage punks will love it. Sadly, the ToneBug Fuzz isn't true bypass, which seems like a major oversight to us. It's the

only pedal in our Group Test that offers easy battery access, however. We're big fans of that. We even like the ToneBug's Homer Simpson-hued paint job. In fact, the only 'd'oh!' we can come up with here is, well, the amount of dough you need to buy one. We reckon £115 is a bit steep for a non-boutique fuzz box, especially with the D*A*M Meathead M-13 lurking so tantalisingly close in price. Somewhere around the Electro-Harmonix Germanium 4 Big Muff Pi's pricetag would make the T-Rex more of a contender. We'd all be more likely to get the 'Bug.

AT A GLANCE

TYPE: Fuzz pedal
CONTROLS: Fuzz, tone, level, effect on/off
SOCKETS: Input, output, power
TRUE BYPASS: No
POWER: Battery, PSU (sold separately)
CONTACT: Westside Distribution 0141 248 4812
www.t-rex-effects.com



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