

Boutique Fuzz Pedals

£139-£229

Six fuzzboxes from manufacturers you may never have heard of...

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Not that it ever really went away, but the humble fuzzbox is having a resurgence of late, with bands such as The Black Keys using some gnarly fuzz-driven tones. Most of the new models come from the ever-expanding 'boutique' sector and several retailers now stock pedals from many of these smaller-scale manufacturers. One such retailer is Wunjo Guitars, which has kindly loaned us half a dozen of its boutique finest to take a look at...



Z.Vex Fuzz Factory

PRICE: £229

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Fuzz pedal

FEATURES: True-bypass

CONTROLS: Volume, gate, comp, drive, stab

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V DC adaptor (3mA) or 9V battery

DIMENSIONS: 118 (w) x 60 (d) x 48mm (h)

www.zvex.com



After the obvious classics born in the 60s and 70s, it's fair to say that the Fuzz Factory is the most well-known and celebrated modern fuzz pedal. Launched almost 20 years ago, it was an original (and anarchic) design, when a lot of pedals were emulations of vintage gear, and quite unique in its compact hand-painted form.

What you get is a five-knob fuzz that uses two new old-stock 60s germanium transistors but offers manipulation of the circuitry like no other. The result is a pedal that needs careful juxtaposition of its knobs to get to the sounds you want, with squeals, howls and feedback along the way while you are getting them that should appeal to sonic adventurers. Beyond that, it can deliver conventional harmonically rich fuzz, cool resonant droning feedback that you can tune to pitch, and gated staccato madness.

Verdict

Yes, it can be a beast that needs taming, but it offers probably the widest variety of fuzz-derived sounds in a single pedal.

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: If you take your fuzz to extremes, get down to the factory...



Darkglass Electronics Duality Fuzz

PRICE: £185

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Fuzz pedal

FEATURES: True-bypass, soft-touch switching

CONTROLS: Blend, duality, level, filter

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V DC adaptor (20mA)

DIMENSIONS: 75 (w) x 111 (d) x 50mm (h)

www.darkglass.com



The Duality takes its name from the fact that it contains two discrete fuzz circuits, exhibiting a similar underlying concept to the Frazz Dazzler but differing in the way it's presented, in that these two can be blended rather than switched. From extreme left to extreme right on the duality knob you can go from a gated saw-tooth wave for a buzzy staccato to a high-gain fat sustaining fuzz that cleans up really well with guitar volume.

All points between the two are available, making for interesting blends, but you can mix the dry guitar sound in for more variation – a blend knob mixes the clean input signal with the fuzz, working with the level knob that sets the volume of the fuzz signal. Add in the filter knob – an extremely wide-ranging tone control – and you have myriad tones to play with.

Verdict

Provides an excellent range of classy sounds, from finely-tuned variations on classic fuzz to blends with clarity.

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: A fuzz that offers a wide range of sounds from just four knobs



<http://bit.ly/guitarist387>

Earthquaker Devices Terminal Fuzz

PRICE: £139**ORIGIN:** USA**TYPE:** Fuzz pedal**FEATURES:** True-bypass**CONTROLS:** Voice, treble, level, fuzz**CONNECTIONS:** Standard input, standard output**POWER:** 9V DC adaptor (>10mA) or 9V battery**DIMENSIONS:** 67 (w) x 126 (d) x 57mm (h)earthquakerdevices.com

Besides the bigger names such as Fuzz Face, Tone Bender and the like, the 60s and 70s saw a variety of fuzz pedals being released, many with quite distinctive sounds. One such was the Shin Ei Companion FY-2 fuzz (available under various brand names) closely associated with The Jesus And Mary Chain and Dan Auerbach.

The Terminal Fuzz is based on that pedal but offers more in the way of control, in that you get separate controls for the output level and fuzz plus a voice knob that changes midrange emphasis, and a treble knob to tweak the top end. At lower levels of the fuzz knob you get practical drive tones that can be shaped with the tone knobs, but keep turning it up and you'll hear more of the buzzy fuzz that you are buying this for – right through to a ripping synth-like *Spirit In The Sky* tone.

Verdict

A specialised tool rather than a generic fuzz – it's got one sound but it's a sought-after sound with distinct character.

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: A versatile alternative for anyone yearning for a vintage Shin Ei FY-2



Dr Scientist Frazz Dazzler

PRICE: £179**ORIGIN:** Canada**TYPE:** Fuzz pedal**FEATURES:** True-bypass, soft-touch switching**CONTROLS:** Sizzle, gain, volume, mix, gain switch, internal trim pot for bass**CONNECTIONS:** Standard input, standard output, expression pedal jack**POWER:** 9V DC adaptor**DIMENSIONS:** 62 (w) x 115 (d) x 50mm (h)www.drscientist.ca

The Frazz Dazzler offers two levels of fuzz via its gain switch, one being low-to-medium gain and the other high gain with a built-in gate effect. But it's the combination of the other knobs that give it its greatest versatility, notably a mix knob that blends dry sound and fuzz that can be controlled with an expression pedal.

The lower-gain fuzz delivers the most practical range of tones, cleaning up nicely with guitar volume and offering everything from a slightly dirty boost to full-on fuzz. Add in some dry signal and there are myriad blends, from dry with a hint of dirt through to fuzz with a touch of extra clarity. Connect an expression pedal to morph between dry and fuzzed, and you have a new range of expressiveness to exploit. For more extreme sputtery, dying-battery fuzz – just flick the gain switch to the right.

Verdict

A versatile pedal anyway, but the inspired expression pedal facility puts the cherry on top.

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: Lets you turn up the fuzz with an expression pedal – cool or what? ➤



Walrus Audio Jupiter Fuzz

PRICE: £145
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Fuzz pedal
FEATURES: True-bypass
CONTROLS: Level, fuzz, tone, mode switch, bass switch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (16mA) or 9V battery
DIMENSIONS: 70 (w) x 121 (d) x 55mm (h)
walrusaudio.com

Walrus Audio says the Jupiter is inspired by the desire for gritty, thick and loud fuzz. It features pretty standard level, fuzz and tone knobs but sports a pair of toggle switches to add more options. One is a bass boost that thickens the low end if you are looking for a weightier sound. The other's a mode switch, offering three different clipping diode arrangements.

The difference between these depends on where you set the level knob, but, with it set at a standard 12 o'clock position, the middle switch position offers an upfront overdrive/distortion, while the two outer settings offer a quieter, more saturated fuzz, one side having plenty of upper-mid presence, the other a more scooped character.

Combining these three options with a wide-ranging tone knob gives the pedal plenty of clout for dialling in a tone that perfectly suits your set-up.

Verdict

With three distinct flavours of fuzz, you are getting plenty for your money here.

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: A gritty, thick fuzz with impressive tonal versatility



Skreddy Hybrid Fuzz Drive

PRICE: £219
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Fuzz pedal
FEATURES: True-bypass
CONTROLS: Volume, fuzz, tightness, presence, mid-boost
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (1 or 2mA) or 9V battery
DIMENSIONS: 66 (w) x 111 (d) x 51mm (h)
skreddypedals.com

The 'Hybrid' part of this pedal's name refers to the fact that it features silicon and germanium transistors. It could also refer to the sound, as this is a multi-faceted pedal rather than an out-and-out fuzzbox. There's plenty of boost available via the volume knob, the presence knob adding a real bite and the mid-boost turning up the gain of the input transistor for amp-like overdrive with sustain and extra harmonics. While the fuzz knob dials in dirt, the tightness control works subtly on the low end.

Skreddy says that the pedal is optimised for humbuckers, as it keeps low frequencies from over-saturating. As such, it works a treat with our Les Paul but also sounds fine with single coils, delivering a sparkly chime, retaining the character and definition of the guitar rather than swamping it.

Verdict

Very natural-sounding distortions, featuring good volume knob clean-up. A versatile pedal in front of your amp.

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: A great all-round dirtbox to complement your amp

