

GEAR Roundup

Xotic Effects

EP-Booster

Based on the preamp stage of an EP-3 Echoplex—which has been used by Jimmy Page, Eddie Van Halen, Eric Johnson and others as a guitar-signal booster/conditioner—the EP-Booster (\$145 retail/street price N/A) is a super-compact unit (3.5" x 1.5" x 1.5") that features a discreet FET preamp with a low-output impedance that makes it well suited for driving long lengths of cable (as well as other effects) without loss of highs or signal. The unit has a quality feel and it looks cool too with its clear plastic Gain knob, blue LED on a black face plate, and buffed zinc housing. A 2.1mm adapter jack is installed for those who don't want the trouble of removing the bottom plate to change a battery. Bass Boost and Bright switches also reside inside, and Xotic recommends using the "off" positions on both for an authentic EP-3 response.

Though butt simple, the EP-Booster could easily become an essential element on your pedalboard. Even when using moderate boost with the Gain knob less than halfway up, the EP made everything sound fatter, juicier, and well, more *vibey*. Cranking the EP-Booster's Gain knob to maximum pushed all of our clean amps into thick distortion that could be easily controlled via the guitars' volume knobs. In this mode, the boost sounded perfectly balanced with no tendencies to get shrieky or splattery—even when the EP's Bright switch was on (which actually is a flat setting). The Bass Boost switch is also useful for making single-coil guitars sound a littler thicker and tougher. No quibbles; the EP-Booster is an highly useful sonic tool and it earns an Editors' Pick Award. —Art Thompson

KUDOS Makes everything sound fatter and cooler. Minimal footprint lets it fit just about anywhere.

CONCERNS None.

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Z.Vex

Distortron

Zachary Vex designed the Distortron (\$149 retail/street price N/A) to sound and respond like a vintage Marshall JTM45 amplifier with all of its controls maxed—and damned if it doesn't. Sporting the same distortion circuit as the hand-painted and somewhat more expensive Box of Rock, but adding a mini-toggle Gain switch for a Tufnel-approved saturation boost, a 3-way Subs switch that lets you optimize the low frequencies to match your amp's bottom end (setting 3 produces the same subs as the Box of Rock), and highly versatile Tone and Drive controls, the Distortron is one mean classic rock machine. True-bypass switching and simple-but-elegant silkscreen graphics enhance the package.

This little pedal impressed me from the first note, and no matter how I tweaked the knobs and switches it never sounded bad. The Volume control offers a massive boost if desired, Tone sweeps a sonically pleasing range from dark and muffled to ultra-bright, and even incremental changes to the Drive control result in different flavors of plexi-inspired goodness. But what really blew me away was how the Distortron responded to playing dynamics and adjustments to my guitar's volume control. Slight pressure and angle changes in picking were immediately reflected in the sound, individual note definition within chords was superb, and even with the Gain set to Hi and the Drive control at three o'clock, I could go from full-on '60s crunch to edgy midrange grind to slightly crispy clean tones by simply rolling back the guitar volume.

If you play rock, blues, or any other style of music that would benefit from old-school Marshall mojo—especially if you can't afford an original or reissue JTM45—the Distortron may be your ticket to Tone Town. —Barry Cleveland

KUDOS Packs a plethora of plexi-inspired tones into a pint-sized pedal.

CONCERNS None

CONTACT zvex.com