

DAREDEVIL RED LIGHT DISTRICT REVIEW

By Matthew Holliman

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Daredevil Pedals founder John Wator designs and builds all of his company's products. And his concepts are, for the most part, driven by a few essentials—years of experience touring and recording, and his taste for all things fuzzy. In fact, with the exception of the Atomic Cock, a filter that approximates a cocked wah pedal, Daredevil *only* produces dirt pedals: from even-tempered overdrives and boosters to a plethora of killer fuzzes.

I loved the combination of craftsmanship, vintage-inspired familiarity, and tones of the Nova and the L.S.D. pedals (which I reviewed, respectively, in the October 2013 and October 2014 issues of *Premier Guitar*). But the Red Light District is more versatile than either of those two fuzzes. It's built around Daredevil's Fearless Distortion, but adds a mid-scoop and a hi/lo gain footswitch (instead of the toggle found on the Fearless) to expand the available overdrive colors. In the process, it delivers diabolical crunch that's ideal for hard rock and stoner metal.

Dirty by Design

Red Light District's medium-sized enclosure is home to three knobs: volume, gain, and scoop. And the scoop control is what really sets the Red Light District apart from the simpler Fearless distortion—enabling players to carve out mids for more pointed, thrashier snarl or bulbous, bottom-heavy growl. This feature may be deactivated by flipping the adjacent on/off switch. It's also worth noting that the switch is positioned so you can actually flip it pretty easily with your foot.

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In addition to the bypass footswitch, there's a hi/lo footswitch that snaps between two gain stages. The Red Light District may be powered via a 9V barrel adaptor on the right-hand side of the unit, or by a 9V battery. The inside of the unit reveals neat hand-wiring and plenty of room for the battery.

Suited for the Swamp

With its hi/lo gain structure, possible applications of the Red Light District add up to a long list. But it was hard to pass up putting it to use in the most obvious contexts, with an Orange OR-50, a Fender Twin Reverb, a Gibson SG, a Les Paul ... and a ton of volume.

Coupling the SG's P-90s with the Orange made it easy to access early Black Sabbath tones by pushing the Red Light District's gain and scoop controls to 3 o'clock. The heavy mid scoop is pretty crucial for nailing that classic Iommi vibe, in particular when things start to get heavy. However, within the context of a full band—especially one with two guitarists—you may need to play around with this setting to find an EQ position that cuts through the chaos. That said, Daredevil has plenty of horsepower to get you above the clamor once you get the midrange right. Unity gain for this setup is just a hair past noon with the hi-gain setting engaged, though if you turn off the mid-scoop toggle, you'll notice a slight volume drop.

Downshifting to the lo-gain setting, I was knocked out by the wealth of usable overdrive tones. The basic overdrive color has a glassy character that evokes early English high-wattage heads. The response is crisp, and the overdrive stays controlled and colorful well into the second half of the gain knob's range. For versatility's sake, I preferred this setup with the mid-scoop off, because the extra air in the midrange feels more dynamic and helps the basic richness of the distortion profile show through.

Studio players and home recording artists will be psyched to know that smaller practice amplifiers like the Fender Champion 600 and solid-state Vox Pathfinder are a great fit for the Red Light District's lower gain settings. The high-gain tone profile sounds great, too, but it's much less articulate with small amps than it is with bigger, high-headroom amplifiers.

The Red Light District feels and behaves pretty differently with Fender-style single-coils. It sounded great with Stratocaster and Jaguar pickups, but, perhaps predictably, you can expect to run into more white noise and feedback situations with single-coils at high gain levels. Even so, the Red Light District can sound fantastic in these more radical, treble-heavy settings. And a Jaguar with my Twin Reverb—with the Red Light District's gain sitting at 1 o'clock, lo-gain engaged, and the scoop off—produced searing Roland S. Howard tones. Even here, the Red Light District was responsive and dynamic, exhibiting slight breakup that got much more pronounced when I really dug into the strings.

The Verdict

It's little surprise that Red Light District can satiate the needs of most high-gain-oriented players—particularly head bangers that tend to nod their skulls to slower, more Sabbath-oid grooves where rich, classic high-gain sounds shine. But the Red Light District also excels in low-gain applications that you might otherwise call "overdrive." It works best with amplifiers with high headroom. And though the effective mid-scoop-based EQ might be limited for some players, the range of tones you can summon from the control set make the \$189 price tag seem very fair.

Ratings

Pros:

Great range of low-to-high gain tones. Dual-footswitch design.

Cons:

No real EQ apart from the mid scoop.

Tones:



Ease of Use:



Build/Design:



Value:



Street:

\$189

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