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Way Huge Conquistador Review

By Charles Saufley / September 11, 2017



Gated fuzz has a weird, polarizing reputation. Some players I know associate it unequivocally with macho stoner rock riffs and hyper-gain doom trips and cringe at its very mention. But I hear gated fuzz as a point on a continuum that originates with primitive, fizzy germanium fuzzes. There's way more to gated fuzz than creating the sonic equivalent of orc armies on the march. And that's why Way Huge's Conquistador Fuzzstortion is such a kick. It's just as happy dishing desert-rock riffage as it is churning up '60s scuzz-punk leads or layering art rock textures in the studio. And while the gating is distinct, there's just enough lingering harmonic content to make the pedal sound complex and even a little soft around the edges.

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A Fuzz by Any Other Name

Conquistador uses a completely familiar control scheme: fuzz, volume, and tone. And apart from the gating, the three controls behave as they would on any fuzz. The enclosure is the usual, high quality Way Huge stuff, and I'm glad they have never succumbed to the miniaturization urge. They look great. The aluminum enclosure means the pedal is light and sturdy. And the switches and pots all function with smooth precision—another Way Huge trademark.

Ratings

Pros:

Rich, even harmonic profile. Apes '60s fuzz sounds with ease. Killer for doubling tracks.

Cons:

None.

Tones:



Ease of Use:



Build/Design:



Value:



Street:

\$149

You can power the unit with a 9V DC adapter, but like most contemporary Way Huge pedals, it also has a super-convenient, easy-to-access battery compartment on the front of the pedal. Interior construction is tidy and looks robust. The circuit board itself seems to float—held aloft by the pins from the three pots and the LED apparatus. The I/O jacks are mounted to their own board, as is the footswitch. And as long as the pedal's cool rubber feet are in place, you don't even need a screwdriver to remove the back cover.

Turn Me up, Shut Me Down

Conquistador's gating is a feature throughout the pedal's range. Some players might like a little more gray area or the ability to blend in the gating effect. But the fixed gating on Conquistador seems to have opened up possibilities elsewhere—like honing the tone circuit to work with low-end sustain output and cultivating a harmonically complex fuzz profile.

The latter quality is a real strength of the Conquistador. As you'd expect, the pedal's voice is strong in the midrange and low end because it can be. Gating means the midrange won't bloom into feedback and the low end won't generate resonant traps. But the Conquistador also features a very cool capacity for high-mid and top-end content that gives the pedal a lovely, almost chorale-like balance at many settings. This evenness is even apparent at maximum treble and fuzz settings, which are perfect for Davie Allen biker fuzz moves or Spacemen 3-style, single-string, quarter-note drones.

Conquistador's rich and even harmonic profile is most evident, however, at medium-gain and low to low-mid focused tone settings. And while I had hoped to avoid the obvious Queens of the Stone Age reference, I cannot deny that the grinding riff from "Regular John" sounds pretty freaking intoxicating through the Way Huge.

The Verdict

Though Conquistador is wired for contemporary gated-fuzz applications, it's overflowing with cool variations on the sound—some of which achieve '60s-vintage fuzz gnarliness more effectively than pedals designed for that purpose. Conquistador can even sound synthy with the crafty use of guitar volume and tone knobs. And its even, focused attack and decay might make it the ideal fuzz for doubling tacks or soloing in an A/B rig. In these ways, Conquistador is a real overachiever. And while it's certainly not a fuzz for everyone (you should definitely spend some time with it before you buy, to see how it reacts to your rig and style), it will doubtless be a source of surprises for players willing to dive deep beyond the most obvious sounds.



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