

MXR

M85 BASS DISTORTION

REVIEW BY **ERIC TISCHLER**STREET PRICE **\$139.99**

The MXR Bass Distortion is based on a distortion so classic, MXR doesn't feel the need to name it, or even give a hint, but they brought in boutique fuzz builders Fuzzrocious to help emulate said pedal. I have no idea what pedal they're referring to, but given how versatile the Bass Distortion is, I daresay it doesn't matter. The Bass Distortion has four knobs and a switch, and between these controls you can summon virtually any distortion you could want. The top left knob is the Dry control, and it dials in the amount of dry signal,

ranging from none to, well, a lot. The top right knob is the Wet control, which determines how much of the distortion is in the signal. On the bottom left is the Tone control; online, MXR says this control is just a high-pass filter, but I thought I heard an increase in bass as I turned the control counterclockwise. The bottom right knob is the Distortion control, which determines how much distortion is applied to the Wet signal. Finally, there is a button that toggles between LED clipping and silicon clipping, determining

the character of the distortion. Taken together, there's very little you can't do with these controls. My only beef with the Dry and Wet controls is that they also function as output controls, boosting the signal as you turn them up, cutting as you turn them down. That means whenever you want more or less of something, you're also affecting the output. Those who are set-it-and-forget-it types (as I am), should only be mildly annoyed, but those who want to toggle between settings during a live

performance may have their work cut out for them.

With that caveat out of the way, let's talk about all the things the Bass Distortion gets right. In general, the distortion cuts a little low end, and that's neither surprising nor necessarily unwanted; a lot of classic distorted bass tones are fairly lean. However, those wanting to add low end back to the signal will be rewarded by the Tone control, which does a magnificent job of bringing in the right amount of muscle as you turn it counter clockwise. If you want more low end but need more top end as well, bringing up the Dry signal will take care of you, as it seems to primarily add attack. Conversely, at some settings (notably LED distortion in, Wet up), the attack can be a little dull but the body is fine; again the Tone control works perfectly, allowing you to dial in a lot of top end

before it gets too fizzy. Speaking of fizzy, the silicon setting offers fizzy, splatty, fuzz-like distortion; it reminded me of a Shin-Ei fuzz, but without the octave overtones. That said, between the Dry and Distortion controls, the effect can be reined in to add some grit and teeth without the splat—I liked this setting for material in the vein of My Bloody Valentine, Queens of the Stone Age, or even late-period John Entwistle, where the distortion acts as compression and is fundamental to the tone. The LED setting has a more “natural” distortion—again, I liked it at lower levels, for, say, Beatles-esque desk overdrive effects, or any song that needed to maintain a rounder low end. That said, the Bass Distortion can really cover any kind of distorted tones you might need, from mild to wild.

WHAT WE LIKE

Great versatility that provides a fantastic range of tones.

CONCERNS

None, but would encourage MXR to consider a master volume control.

