



Xotic SL Drive Chrome Edition Reviewed

July 30, 2015

Stompboxes with small footprints are an obvious plus for any pedalboard, and Xotic's new SL Drive Chrome Edition (\$124 street), packs a lot into a rugged cast-aluminum enclosure that measures only 3.5" x 1.5" x 1.5". Only 3,000 units are being produced in this limited-edition package, which also includes the Xotic Voltage Doubler, a small unit that interfaces between the SL Drive and an optional 9VDC power supply to increase the voltage up to 18VDC for increased headroom and presence.

A sweet looking unit with its polished top cover and amber LED, the SL Drive features clear plastic knobs for Drive and Tone, and has a smaller trimmer for Volume. The output jacks are side mounted and the click-on mechanical switch provides a true bypass when the effect is disengaged. For all its compactness, the SL Drive still manages to house a 9v battery. Along with the distortion circuitry, the unit also features four internal DIP switches that toggle between two settings each: high/mid frequency #1, high/mid frequency #2, high/mid cut, and +6db boost. These switches enable you to fine-tune the EQ for a variety of Marshall-influenced tones that the SL Drive is designed to deliver. The manual offers four different control knob *and* DIP switch settings for popular distortion tones such as "Humbucker Mr. Big 1969" and "Single-Coil Blackmore-esque," but getting great sounds from this pedal doesn't require much study.

The SL Drive's smooth, liquidy distortion comes on fast as Drive is turned up, and whether you want bluesier sounding grind or super-sustaining hard-rock and metal tones, it's all just a few knob twists away. The pedal's strong output lets you run lower Drive settings without level suckage, and the Tone knob easily accommodates humbuckers or bright single-coils. In

the latter case, I found it easy to get buttery distortion on the bridge pickups of either a Buzz Feiten T-Pro or a John Page Classic Ashburn. A '59 Historic Les Paul and a new PRS McCarty also sounded fat and juicy through the SL Drive, and had plenty of slice even when pushing out ridiculous amounts of distortion. The difference in dynamic response when using the Voltage Doubler wasn't all that dramatic, but the tones do get a touch brighter. At any rate it's simple enough to use this increased voltage option, and more is always more, right?

A cool sounding distortion box with enough EQ power to tailor itself to probably any guitar you throw at it, the SL Drive goes a long way toward giving you access to the ballpark of boosted/modded vintage-Marshall tones that have long been a benchmark by which distortion pedals are judged. As such, the SL Drive is darned satisfying and it earns an Editors' Pick Award. —*Art Thompson*

KUDOS Very compact. Wide gain range. Excellent EQ.

CONCERNS None.

CONTACT xotic.us/effects/sl-drive