

MXR DISTORTION III

THE LATEST STOMPER FROM THE MXR STABLE RETURNS TO FAMILIAR TERRITORY. DAVID GREEVES WITNESSES THE THIRD COMING OF THE MXR DISTORTION

The MXR Distortion Plus dates back to the 1970s, when it found favour with many a pro, including the late Randy Rhoads and Jerry Garcia (and it happens to be this month's Pawn Star on page 127). The mustard yellow stomper was simple to use, having just two knobs (for output level and distortion), and seemed to produce the goods with just about any amp and guitar.

The Distortion II followed, adding filter and resonance controls, and now MXR, part of the Jim Dunlop family these days (the original company was wound up in 1984), has brought out a third distortion stompbox. The Distortion III (or M-115, to give it its official designation) returns to the compact MXR format that will be instantly familiar to owners of classic pedals like the Phase 90 or Dyna Comp. The slim cast-metal case has been given a bright orange-red paint job this time around, and there are controls for output, distortion and



GBINFO

MXR DISTORTION III

PRICE: £99

TYPE: Overdrive/distortion stompbox

FEATURES: Output, tone and distortion controls

POWER: 9V battery or 9V DC mains adaptor (not supplied)

DIMENSIONS: 60(w) x 55(h) x 110(d) mm

CONTACT:

JHS & Co Ltd
PHONE: 01132 865381
WEB: www.jimdunlop.com

GBOPINION

MXR DISTORTION III GOLD STARS

- ★ Warm overdrive sounds
- ★ Good build quality

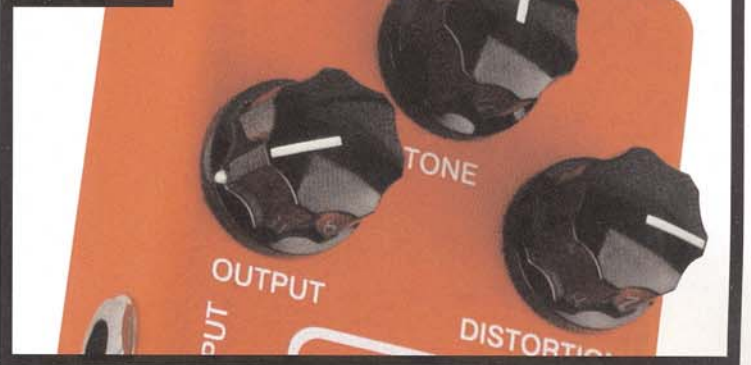
BLACK MARKS

- Mid emphasis will not be to everyone's taste

GBRATING



The markers on the MXR's knobs glow in the dark – perfect for murky rock venues



tone as well as the usual latching footswitch and a red LED indicator.

THIRD BASE

Changing the 9V battery involves unscrewing the four small screws that hold the baseplate on. Inside is a tidily finished PCB, just as you'd expect – MXR has a reputation for build and reliability, and we'd expect nothing less from this new pedal. You can forego the hassle of battery changes by using a mains adaptor, and the Distortion III accepts the standard centre-negative variety. It's always best to keep a fresh cell in a pedal though, lest the adaptor lead somehow get pulled out. However, this pedal uses true bypass switching so, should both battery and adaptor fail, at least your guitar signal can still pass through rather than disappearing completely.

Out of the box, there are no rubber feet or pads on the bottom of the pedal, which is good news if you want to stick on some Velcro tape and attach it to a pedalboard, and some foam pads are included that you can affix to add grip if you're using it on the floor – most thoughtful.

THREE'S ALOUD

One of the great strengths of the original Distortion Plus was that it had a relatively mild effect on the guitar's tone. This was key to its versatility, as it didn't smother the original sound with lashings of dirt. The Distortion

III is very much cut from the same cloth: the word 'distortion' might suggest otherwise, but this is not the place to look for extreme grunge or buzz-saw fuzz. Don't get us wrong though – at higher settings, the Distortion III is capable of some very meaty driven sounds.

Like some other drive pedals, the Distortion III has a basic tone that's quite middly and can sound a bit honky, but this also gives rise to some really raunchy bark and bite. Added to an amp that's turned up loud and is already kicking out plenty of bass and treble, this mid hump is designed to drive the amp into smooth distortion while also cutting through the rest of the band. It's best applied to a good, warmed-up valve amp – heard at lower volumes or through a clean solid-state amp, the results may not impress as much. Also, if you like a more natural, open sound you'll want to keep the tone knob all the way up to preserve the top end.

At lower settings on the distortion control you get a great warm overdrive, with plenty of volume boost available via the output knob. At the other extreme, the sound is fully saturated but not overly harsh or indistinct – picking dynamics are preserved to an extent and chords still have good definition. But the best thing you can do with the Distortion III is set all three knobs at 12 o'clock, turn the amp up to 13 and blaze away. **GB**