

Although they don't look at all vintage, BSM makes painstakingly accurate electronic copies of some half-forgotten classic effects pedals. Could our intrepid reviewer Huw Price be in need of a boost? Let's find out...

BSM Boosters

Mk2, Fireball, VX-T and Fuzz Bender

Germanium transistors in Germany? So many bad jokes, so little space... anyways, BSM goes to great lengths sourcing new old stock components, many of which were made 30 or 40 years ago. Tonehounds wax lyrical about names such as Valvo, Phillips, Tungram and Mullard and their OC44s and OC76s. So maybe you do need original spec components to capture that authentic vintage tone.

But what about the hassles? Vintage pedals are notorious for picking up radio interference, and sonic performance can vary dramatically with temperature. BSM uses modern spec cast metal chassis casings and the assembled circuits are soaked in balls of resin before being allowed to dry for three days. It seems to work; when we reviewing some BSM boxes for the December 2003 issue we left them in the freezer and experienced no problems. Let's see if this batch of BSMs is as impressive as the last lot.

MK2

This is based on the 1969 FET version of the JHS treble boost that Ritchie Blackmore preferred for smaller venues and TV shows. It produces less gain and distortion than the HS and it's designed for guitars with low coil inductance pickups such as Fender's, Rickenbackers and Gibsons. Besides the on/off switch there's a single Focus control on the side to optimize the response for high output and standard pickups.



The MK2 is not transparent but the gain is startling: it will push any non-master volume valve amp into distortion regardless of volume settings. The tone is thick, with a touch of midrange compression and plenty of bite. There's also a treble lift that, while not excessive, might make you

lower the treble on your amp. Winding the Focus control clockwise increases gain and fatness, albeit at the expense of a little clarity. Mixed results causes mixed feelings about this pedal.

Through a tweed Fender Deluxe the tone was gritty and a bit too harsh. On the other hand, it certainly gave my Vox AC10 a much-needed kick up the arse, and the inherently dark nature of the Vox interfaced better with the treble boost. The Mk2 can coax an early '70s rock tone out of a valve amplifier adding crunch and bite. However, unlike the Fulltone Fat Boost or Klon Centaur, it colours the sound, making this a niche product rather than a general-purpose boost box.



RRP:
£132

RRP:
£122

RRP:
£122

RRP:
£159

FACTFILE

MK2

Description: Treble booster based on FET version of the 1969 JHS pedal

RRP: £122

FIREBALL

Description: Treble booster based on 1967 JHS pedal with specially selected germanium transistors

RRP: £159

VX-T

Description: Treble booster based on the original Vox pedal

RRP: £122

FUZZ BENDER

Description: Fuzz pedal based on original Fuzz Face and Tone Bender circuits

RRP: £132


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It sounded much like the Tone Bender and it had a little more bass.

The name Fuzz Bender is appropriate for this hybrid (and it's probably a better choice than Face Bender). There are controls for Fuzz and Volume and a switch to toggle between the Fuzz Face and Tone Bender sounds. The left position is Fuzz Face mode. It's extremely fat and BSM has resisted the urge to sanitise the sound. It's sustaining, thick and gritty, making pickup selection almost irrelevant. However, some players might crave a little more Big Muff-style high frequency cut.

The right position activates Tone Bender mode for a more aggressive edge. There's less low-end thump and the midrange sounds slightly scooped but we love the reedy sustain and slightly nasal honk. The reduced bandwidth also helps notes to cut through and the sound cleans up really well. In both modes the controls have a very wide useable range – and it's not noisy.

It all depends how you like your fuzz pedals to sound. Are they your passport to sustaining psychedelic solos, or are they an essential ingredient for psycho sonic adventures? Whatever you want, the Fuzz Bender is likely to satisfy both camps as it's a damn fine fuzzbox. 

combination. Given the huge boost, it's unlikely to work with other pedals on an effects board.

VX-T

In the '60s many British rock guitarists used the Vox Treble & Bass booster – probably because they didn't have much choice! However, the early units were susceptible to radio interference and, according to BSM, 'weakly and woolly bass'. Nevertheless, BSM decided to recreate this circuit, but the improvements it's made apparently guarantee a 'fine bass bottom'.

The resulting VX-T is a more generally useable boost pedal than both the Mk2 and Fireball. The gain hike is less daunting and the tone is warmer and more vintage. The sweep range of the tone control is extremely wide and its effect is dramatic. Backed right off the sound is bassy and thick with very little treble content. It's bright and razor sharp all the way, with jangle aplenty.

More natural tone cuts through and the guitar sound retains a better frequency balance without getting too thin when the volume is turned down. BSM rightly claims that, with a little bit of treble cut, the sound is reminiscent of the fixed wah tone made famous by the likes of Mick Ronson and Michael Schenker. However, the wah effect is not quite as strong.

Clean boosts can make your guitar and amp sing without losing definition, clarity or dynamics. Many players buy hot pickups hoping for similar results but often this decision is the wrong one. The best boosts can be pricey but the VX-T is a fine compromise – if you like its tonal colour. Pity there's no volume control.

FUZZ BENDER

Gary Hurst's early '60s design became the Vox Tone Bender Mk1, and various versions were used by The Beatles, The Who and The Yardbirds. In 1966 Arbiter jumped on the fuzz train and introduced that foxy favourite – the Fuzz Face.



VERDICT

The authentic vintage features might not suit everyone; none of these pedals has a power supply socket and controls are very limited. BSM must produce the widest range of treble boosters

around and each has a sound of its own. So the bottom line is that you'll have to try them yourself. The Fuzz Bender is a departure for BSM but it nails a convincing and wide range of vintage fuzz tones.



chunky Solidly built with resin dipped circuits

FIREBALL

Like the BSM HS, this is another take on the 1967 JHS treble booster but it features specially selected germanium transistors – so supply is strictly limited. Richie Blackmore anoraks will be interested to learn that the Fireball is designed to capture his more aggressive sound circa '71 and BSM's purist aesthetic extends to dispensing with the volume control.

This one was liked immediately. Compared to the Mk2, the tone is less coloured and more transparent – but the boost levels are similarly insane. Although BSM maintains that the Fireball is not intended for

'bedroom' players we disagree: the Fireball is a perfect way to get cool overdrive out of a low power valve amp at practice volume levels. The pedal pushes the preamp stage to the limits and the amp's volume control acts as a master volume without the overall tone sounding wimpy or thin.

When you crank things up, though, you'll be amazed to hear your amp producing sounds that you have never heard before: squeaky harmonics, solid lows and creamy sustain with very little apparent colouration.

Be warned, though, that when you turn down the volume knob on your guitar things do change. The sound cleans up, but the overall tone acquires a Fender style glassiness that cuts right through. Once again this is a specialist pedal that's really designed to be used as part of a guitar-booster-amp

Clean boosts really can make your guitar and amp sing without losing definition or dynamics