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MXR Custom Badass '78 Distortion

High-gain retro distortion

PRICE: £109
CONTACT: JHS, 0113 286 5381
www.jhs.co.uk

The '78 Distortion may be a fiery box of all-out filth, but who ever knew all-out filth could be so downright classy? MXR kicked off their new Custom Badass series with this little red unit, and they'll be hard-pushed to match it with whatever comes next. It's fantastic for both solos and chord work, it sounds vintage and modern at the same time... and it's not half as expensive as it sounds. In fact, bizarrely, this is one of the cheapest pedals in the whole MXR range.

The '78 will not give you the transparent grit of a boutique overdrive, not even at the very bottom of the distortion dial, but neither will it rip out the core of your clean tone or turn it to ragged-edged mush. Its fundamental voice is fuzzy but tight, rather in the manner of a heavily cranked JTM45 with some midrange scooped out; it has a wonderfully solid bottom end, plenty of sparkle at the top and a tone control that's perfectly judged for taming the spikes just as much as you need to. Then there's the trump card: that little white Crunch button, a sonic steroid injection that comes on with a blinding blue light and boosts the harmonic content to make everything sound a touch more hot and lively. There is nothing not to adore about this pedal.



ITALIA Maranello Speedster 2

Stop-tail humbucking solidbody

PRICE £529
CONTACT JHS, 0113 286 5381
www.jhs.co.uk

This sleek six-string is all about hot rod performance. It might be loosely based on the Framus Hollywood from the early '60s, but this guitar is less nostalgic-looking than many of its Korean-made Italia stablemates. The sleek twin-shallow cutaway styling is enhanced by sporty cosmetics with go-faster stripes on both body and headstock.

A glued-in maple neck maintains the speedy theme, as does the 22-fret bound rosewood fingerboard. The body boasts tone-conscious korina construction and carries two direct-mounted Wilkinson humbuckers partnered by simple but effective circuitry comprising master volume and tone controls plus a three-way selector. The hardware is equally straightforward, with strings secured in a chunky but smooth wrapover bridge/tailpiece also courtesy of Trevor Wilkinson.

The high-powered pickups ensure that the Speedster is more muscle car than boy racer, but ample output is accompanied by even balance and good definition. These qualities count when the gain content is increased, helping this Italia to match its mean machine image via sounds that span bluesy twang to edgy aggression. The impressive end result is an all-out rocker with very obvious visual individuality.

High-powered pickups ensure that this Italia Maranello Speedster 2 is more a muscle car than a boy racer

