

MODTONE

CLASSIC VALVE DISTORTION

REVIEW BY **FLETCHER STEWART**

STREET PRICE **\$59.95**



LESS IS MORE WITH A THROATY ROAR

What's little, yellow and packs more '80s crunch than a pack of Pop Rocks? No, it's not an old MXR Distortion+ or a vintage DOD 250. Unlike those classic dirt boxes that were meant to be paired with a cooking Marshall stack, the new ModTone MT-CD crams the whole driven stack experience into a no-frills three-knob package.

To my ears, this little inexpensive yellow stomper starts off in late-'70s classic crunch territory. The tone of a fire-breathing, early master volume-endowed JMP comes to mind in the

first half of the gain dial. It's open and throaty, yet defined and tight in the low end, like a good pair of close-fitting leather trousers. If I had a bullet belt and a B.C. Rich, I would go Mick Mars on it with a riff from *Too Fast for Love*—an album I love unapologetically and the first tape that I ever acquired.

Going past the noon marker on the Gain dial takes us from proto-thrash to full-on JMP-1 rack preamp meltdown and modded Marshall madness. To reference the tonal shift of saturation, think *Killers-*era Iron Maiden to Slayer's

Seasons in the Abyss. Though it has gobs of gain on tap, chords ring clear and detailed with searing sparkle showers of harmonics shearing off the metal edge. Staccato palm-muted blitzkriegs remain chunky and articulate, like a Dave Mustaine machine-gun firing squad. Since we are boiling the hipster guitar bible in a pool of blood, brown Telecasters and beard hair, I will reveal another forbidden technique from the metal days of yore at which this pedal excels: the long-prohibited pinch harmonic. Yes, if one feels the need to show their scarred

over stigmata of squeal techniques the MT-CD can get downright John Christ on the matter. Show me “How the Gods Kill” indeed.

After that trip down Metal Memory Lane, I must stress that this box can cover a lot of musical ground outside of the wicked walls. At about 10 o’ clock on the Gain with the Level just past unity and the Tone between ten and two, we are knee-deep in *Rio Grande Mud-era ZZ Top*. That record still sounds so slick today and this pedal nails the tone at lower Gain settings. Grab a Strat and turn the tone knob to a slightly darker setting and we are biting distorted doubloons at the tonal end of Ritchie Blackmore’s *Rainbow*. Basically, if it is a throaty, woody-yet-chiming-stack-in-a-box that is needed, the MT-CD will deliver.

WHAT WE LIKE

If one is after a cheap well-built Marshall-like stomper that can go from classic rock, to hair metal, to thrash, it would prove near impossible to find a better sounding piece at this price point. In fact, this unassuming little yellow bruiser can punch well above it’s weight in tone—a characteristic shared across the range of ModTone pedals. This is a full-range distortion pedal in every facet. No nasally dark bass-less overdrive here. It packs a stack-like wallop that is heavy on the tone and light on the wallet—pure and simple.

CONCERNS

Want to pay a premium for hand-painted graphics, mythical clipping diodes and little aromatic jute bags? Look elsewhere. The MT-CD sounds way better than it looks, but some will miss out because the price is just too low for it to rock right? Wrong.

