

VOX COOLTRON

VOX'S COOLTRON PEDALS are an anomaly in the tube-driven distortion pedal market. While tubes are designed to operate best at high voltages and currents, Vox has invented an ingenious circuit that uses low voltage and reduced heater current to drive a 12AU7 tube, providing the preamp tube distortion guitarists love in a battery-operable stomp box. All Cooltron pedals are housed in flashy chrome cases and feature retro-looking chicken-head knobs. Four AA batteries provide up to 16 hours of dirty deeds for play-



ers who loathe filling up their power strips with unwieldy wall warts (an optional AC adaptor is also available).

Big Ben Overdrive

The Big Ben Overdrive may seem to lack frills—it has tone, volume and gain controls and an effect on/off switch—but it makes up for its perceived shortcomings by providing ample sonic thrills. Like any good overdrive pedal, the Big Ben sounds as if it's an integrated part of your amp, complementing its tone while broadening its sonic palette. The tone control is surprisingly versatile, providing usable sounds, from boosted bass to sizzling highs, across its entire range. The midrange remains focused, musical and natural sounding, with none of the strange, nasal-

like overtones found in many lesser pedals.

The Big Ben's tube overdrive sounds very smooth and luscious. With the volume control cranked up, the pedal delivers a considerable volume boost for solos while it pushes your amp and speakers into the overdrive sweet spot. Strings retain their chunk and attack while single notes swell into creamy sustain. ■

PRO: Outstanding natural tube distortion and overdrive

CON: Poorly placed LED

Bulldog Distortion

Metal guitarists who want even more insane gain and tonal versatility should opt for the Bulldog Distortion. Costing only slightly more than the Big Ben Overdrive, the Bulldog offers an additional gain channel, bass

and treble controls and a Gain 1/Gain 2 switch in addition to the effect on/off switch. Gain 1 delivers classic vintage-style distortion that barks, while Gain 2 serves up aggressive, modern tones with more bite. Gain 2 also features a voice control that scoops or boosts the mids to your preference. The bass and treble controls are also well voiced, providing big bottom without mush and stinging highs without thinning out. While the Bulldog excels at everything from AC/DC-style crunch to Metallica-like mosh, it offers tones that also satisfy users looking for something in between these extremes. For example, when using the pedal with a great clean amp tone, Gain 1 can be set for bluesy, Stevie Ray-style overdrive while Gain 2 provides smooth, compressed lead tones.

Both pedals sound as cool as they look. My only criticism is that the LEDs on both pedals are located too close to the switches, so you can't tell if the effect or desired gain mode is engaged until you move your foot out of the way. ■

PRO: Flexible two-channel design; classic and modern tones

CON: Poorly placed LED

LIST PRICES: Big Ben Overdrive, \$200.00; Bulldog Distortion, \$225.00
MANUFACTURER: Vox Amplification, voxamps.co.uk

