

With dedicated treble, bass and mid controls, it's possible to dial up a complex and subtle distortion on the Metal Muff



£79

Alongside its mental distorted tone, the Metal Muff offers a Top Boost to make your solos soar



## ELECTRO-HARMONIX MUFFS

TG CHECKS OUT THE LATEST ADDITIONS TO THE MUFF FAMILY. LET THERE BE FUZZ... WORDS: HENRY YATES

### METAL MUFF

TG has identified two social trends over the course of this review. First off, people now prefer their pedals to be smaller. Secondly, they like them to be filthier. The new Electro-Harmonix Metal Muff is a pedal for the guitarist who isn't satisfied by the Big Muff's grind. It's the weapon of choice for the kind of band who believe their gigs should be endured rather than enjoyed. By implication, this is a pedal designed for the heaviest of heavy metallers. And according to Electro-Harmonix, it's the best one that's ever been built.

The Metal Muff doesn't have any heritage to protect, and it can't be bothered to keep up the pretence that it's just been found in a collector's attic. And so, in contrast to the retro styling of the Little Big Muff, this unit takes its visual cues from the modern FX market with a black diecast chassis and a spiky logo that leaves you in no doubt of its animalistic intentions. The basic format remains much the same, however, with the standard input/output and spring-loaded buttons combined with the choice between

an internal battery or 9V power adaptor (sold separately, despite the £79 price tag).

We haven't fired it up yet, but TG likes the sound of the Metal Muff's spec sheet. On paper, this pedal offers more control than most of the distortion stompers that pass through TG Towers. As well as the footswitch that activates the basic effect (and the red

*"In its rawest form, the Metal Muff's distorted tone strikes a fantastic balance between vintage and modern..."*

LED that confirms this), you have also got three EQ bands that allow precise tweaking of the sound. TG would have expected to see treble and bass for this sort of price, but the surprise inclusion of a midrange control should let us sculpt a much more subtle sound than 'biting' or 'booming'. There's also a distortion control, allowing for up to 10db of input gain and a master volume that allows you to balance dirt with overall output (making it a feasible choice for bedst shredders).

Distortion is the first of the Metal Muff's available functions. To sweeten the deal even further, Electro-Harmonix have also

thrown in a Top Boost feature that can be easily activated via a stomp on the second switch and monitored via a dedicated level control. With access to anything between 3.5-4.3 kHz, this should be perfect for lifting a ferocious solo to the next level or for accentuating a cool phrase that you want to slice through the quagmire of the rhythm

section. It's a setting for showboaters, basically, which suits us lot just fine.

Right, let's go to work! As usual, TG started off with a mild distortion although, when it comes to this pedal, that's a relative term. Sure you can keep the volume low and back off the gain, but the power of this unit still slaps you in the face. In its rawest form the Metal Muff's distorted tone strikes a fantastic balance between vintage and modern, and once you start fiddling with the EQ dials you can push it convincingly in either direction. Scooping the midrange, bumping up the treble and bass and laying on the distortion, for instance, unlocks a vicious Metallica tone that combines beautifully with percussive playing. Easing off the gain and cranking up the mid brings you closer to Clapton territory. The clincher is the Top Boost, which plunged a shot of testosterone into the arm of our shred solos.

The distortion market may be bursting at the seams, but there's always room for a pedal as good as the Metal Muff. With a cracking list of features, a seething tone and a competitive price tag, this is one of the best distortion pedals we've ever stomped our boots on. In short, it's well worthy of the hallowed Muff name.

FOR: Mental tone and cracking features  
AGAINST: Not a damn thing

TG RATING:



#### INFORMATION

ORIGIN: US  
TYPE: Distortion pedal with Top Boost  
CONTROLS: Effect on/by-pass, Boost on/by-pass, Volume, Top Boost, Treble, Mid, Bass, Distortion  
POWER SUPPLY: 9V adaptor (sold separately)  
DIMENSIONS (HxWxD): 117 x 144 x 38 (mm)  
CONTACT: Hot Rox UK  
0115 9873163  
WEB: www.ehx.com



## GEAR ELECTRO-HARMONIX MUFFS

Despite its diminutive size, the Little Big Muff offers the same sustained distortion as its older brother



£55

The Little Big Muff has a boomy bottom end, but an intuitive Tone dial allows you to bring edge to your sound

### INFORMATION

**ORIGIN:** US  
**TYPE:** Distortion sustainer pedal  
**CONTROLS:** Effect on/by-pass, Sustain, Tone, Volume  
**POWER SUPPLY:** 9V adaptor (sold separately)  
**DIMENSIONS (HxWxD):** 117 x 91 x 35 (mm)  
**CONTACT:** Hot Rox UK 0115 9873163  
**WEB:** www.ehx.com

## TG CHECKS OUT THE LATEST ADDITIONS TO THE MUFF FAMILY. LET THERE BE FUZZ... WORDS: HENRY YATES

TG wasn't alive in 1971. But if we had been, we'd have slipped on some platform shoes, jumped on the first plane to New York City and picked up an original Electro-Harmonix Big Muff from Mike Matthews' showroom. The Big Muff is the most legendary distortion-sustainer pedal in music history. From David Gilmour's solo on *Comfortably Numb* to Kirk Cobain's fuzzy freakouts on *Breed*, it has probably appeared on more rock 'n' roll classics than anything else. The fact that its name makes the TG team snigger is merely a bonus.

As with any world-beating product, there have been countless Muff offshoots since the release of the original US unit, and those versions vary widely in function and performance. In 2006, the Electro-Harmonix catalogue lists everything from the US and Russian Big Muff reissues to the English Muff'N and Double Muff. For this review, TG is testing the smallest and the noisiest members of the family...

## LITTLE BIG MUFF

Size mattered to the rock star of the 1970s. Big hair and terrifying codpieces were twinned with monstrous Marshall stacks and double-neck guitars, meaning that the paving slab dimensions of the original Big Muff fitted right in. But now the tide has turned. To match our modern fixation with boutique amps, Smart Cars and Chihuahuas, Electro-Harmonix have downsized the technology of their famous fuzz pedal. We never thought we'd say this, but the Big Muff is now pretty small.

Still, at least it's perfectly formed. Lifting the Little Big Muff out of the box with our enormous Gulliver fingers, TG was struck by

how cool this pedal looks. In contrast to the buffed finish of most FX units, the die-cast chassis has a scuffed-up matt effect that looks as though it's spent the past decade being kicked around the stage by a roadie in winkle pickers. Combined with the red 3D lettering and the trio of retro control dials, this modern Muff oozes vintage character. Our one criticism is that Electro-Harmonix have sanded down the sharp corners of the original – a needless embellishment.

We'd defy anyone to break this fucker. To all intents and purposes, it's a steel brick with four screws that you remove to get at the battery (we'd suggest using a 9V power adaptor instead) and four rubber nubbins that secure it to the stage. The spring-loaded button and inputs are standard fare, while the presence of a red LED (letting you know whether the effect is on or bypassed) is the only thing we would describe as a luxury rather than a necessity.

Before we plug in, it's worth stressing that the Little Big Muff's tone is not intended as a straight recreation of the US unit. According to the Electro-Harmonix blurb, it should sit halfway between the sound of the American and Russian versions, which should be interesting seeing as the latter's boomy bottom end made it particularly popular among bass players.

Critics of the Big Muff sometimes argue that it's not a very versatile pedal. That might be true in terms of the knob count (as with the original, you've got three dedicated controls for the sustain, tone and volume), but we'd counter that it's possible to get some wildly diverse tones from this unit. With the little bugger wired up between our Telecaster and Marshall, TG kicked off with the tone and sustain dials set low. The results are striking and utterly unique, with the Little Big Muff supplying a bass-heavy Hendrix grind whose rough edges suggest our amp speakers have been slashed.

We loved it, but we started getting even better results when we eased up the aforementioned dials to top whack. This is when the Big Muff concept really starts kicking in, as your fuzzy notes start to

take on biting definition and the increased sustain seems to make them hang endlessly in the air. Even with a thin-bodied singlecoil electric guitar we found ourselves picking a single note and waiting about 15 seconds while the room stopped shaking. Electro-Harmonix are right when they say there's probably a bit more bottom end on this unit than on the US version, and Muff purists should be aware of this. For everyone else, this pedal will bolster your tone nicely, excelling at anything from dirty grunge to prog rock.

Maybe the Little Big Muff doesn't have quite the same kudos as a reissue of the original, but in all other respects, TG reckons the concept has made a seamless transition from big to small. 30 years is a long time in rock 'n' roll, and the fact that the Big Muff's unmistakable distortion still stops us in our tracks is testament to what a stroke of genius this unit really is.

**FOR:** Fantastic tone and serious kudos  
**AGAINST:** For another £13 you could get the US reissue

**TG RATING:** ★★★★★

