



# MI Audio Overdrive Pedals

Australian hand-made pedals to die for by Tom Sowonja pics Matti Puckridge

**M**I Audio is only an infant in the big bad world of pedal manufacturers, but with the quality of the products currently available, we hope they will be around for a long time to come.

The MI Audio range of overdrives were tested using a '74 Guild S-50 through a Fender '65 Twin Reverb reissue and exceeded expectations with the clarity and depth of their sound, the quality of the construction and the responsiveness of the sound.

## Tube Zone Overdrive

The lead pedal of the MI Audio range, the Tube Zone, is a flexible pedal that can dial in sounds ranging from crunch to distortion. Any overdrive need can be serviced from this machine.

The Tube Zone has been built with control in mind. The flexibility of the pedal is based on a range of parameters mounted on the top of the pedal. Besides allowing the player to set the level of drive and output volume, the Tube Zone has a unique power supply section allowing it to produce high output signals with lots of headroom.

The Tube Zone controls allow you to adjust the drive, volume, tone (high/low balance control), mids, brightness and character (a unique pre-overdrive bass

control for added thickness to the tone).

The pedal offers devastating distortion with the drive and character controls turned up, allowing for a rounded bass response in the distortion. However, this baby doesn't stop there. Turning the drive to full and bringing back down the character allows a Hendrix-like buzzsaw fuzz sound to flow from every note you fret with everlasting sustain that would make Santana weep.

Wind down the distortion and you end up with melodic-sounding crunch that will have you playing your Keith Richards riffs with authenticity.

The Tube Zone is a meaty and versatile pedal allowing sounds from amp-driven crunch to hard-edged distortion. Dialling in a range of sounds is simple. The range of variables means you can sculpt your distortion to best match your guitar and amp.

Run the pedal with the drive and volume at full and wind back the volume on your guitar to allow access to the range of tube tone at your fingertips.

## Crunch Box Distortion

The Crunch Box is a small red box containing MI Audio's wildest distortion. The moment it is plugged in, you'll be tempted to barrel into some early hard rock riffs.

It has the simplest of controls – gain, tone, and volume. The pedal is based on a cascaded gain design which contributes to the wild distortion.

There's a variety of very "British" sounding distortion tones on offer with a low noise floor. Compared to other high gain products, you won't notice that the Crunch Box is on until you start playing.

This reviewer is a long-time user of Electro Harmonix's Russian-made Big Muff and found that with the gain turned up, the Crunch Box had a similar, but more controllable, sustained tone with a couple of added benefits.

With the gain set fairly low,

the tone rolled off and the output pushing the amplifier the, Crunch Box can be used to emulate Clapton's famous Cream-era "Woman Tone".

With gain up high you will notice that the sound of the Crunch Box is all late sixties/early seventies hard rock, perfect for large bombastic riffs. Winding the tone control full creates the perfect palette for grunge rock power chording.

## Blue Boy Deluxe

A classic blues overdrive pedal that can add a unique texture to your singing lead lines and crunch to every classic rock riff you can master. It features the same controls and power supply design as the Tube Zone, though the circuit architecture is wildly different, resulting in a wonderful difference in tone. The Blue Boy Deluxe is one of those pedals that every guitarist should have in their pedal board. Like the rest of the MI Audio range, it has been built to give the player the ability to cover the widest range of sound available. The character control really helps to warm up the sound and create a smooth overdrive. Alternately, roll off the drive and character and turn up the volume to have an effective treble booster to push the tubes in your amp to overdrive.

When compared to other blues drivers on the market, the Blue Boy Deluxe offers more versatility and better design than any of the mass-produced models, while being great value when compared to other boutique pedals. The Blue Boy Deluxe is perfect for crunchy Stones-style riffing and blues soloing.

## Blues Pro Overdrive

A versatile overdrive with a straightforward operation. The Blues Pro has the same controls as the Crunch Box, though with a different circuit design, making it the perfect counterpart to the Crunch Box. The Blues Pro has an added Fuzz Mod toggle switch at the back of the pedal which changes the gain structuring of the pedal.

The Blues Pro exists in the same sonic space as the Blue Boy Deluxe and represents a good option as an entry-

level model for a young player looking to be able to drive and amp and get a solid classic overdrive sound. The Fuzz Mod switch at the back of the pedal increases the crunchy tone and certainly makes the Blues Pro a more versatile pedal than other straight overdrives. A solid overdrive that can be used as a treble booster and provide the crunch necessary for classic rock riffage.

## GI Fuzz

A wide range of gain control means the GI Fuzz can give you nice bluesy drive through to a more modern high-gain fuzz tone. There are five specialty features: Load (controls the input impedance allowing the tone to range from a muddy fuzz to a bright detailed fuzz), bias (controls the clipping of the fuzz from fat symmetrical fuzz to a more

**MI AUDIO PEDALS** TEST RESULTS

**WE LIKED** Boutique pedal construction at an affordable price. True bypass switching for integrity of tone. An overdrive for every occasion. Ability to run each pedal off a standard 9V power supply.

**WE DISLIKED** There wasn't much to dislike – the only downside was that the fuzz pedals were too tame.

buzz-like sound), tone, body, and a three-position brightness switch. Marketed as a "hi-gain fuzz", it certainly answers on this promise. The GI Fuzz is loud! The range of variables means that getting a good fuzz sound quickly can be hit or miss, though this reviewer had come across similar pedals before and was able to quickly achieve the desired effect.

It's a modern-sounding fuzz pedal with a lot of high end, which can be attenuated with the aforementioned brightness switch.

Overall though fuzz is a subjective measure and this reviewer found that the GI Fuzz was pitched more towards "American" sounding fuzz rather than the vintage "British" fuzz of Hendrix, it had more of a drive and distorted sound than the buzzsaw sound of other Fuzz's available.

## Neo Fuzz

The Neo Fuzz is less of a fuzz and closer to a Tube Screamer in the type of tone

you can achieve, though it still has the ability to traverse the same territory as its sister pedal the GI Fuzz. Sharing the features and design as the GI Fuzz, it uses different transistors in its design which gives it a more rounded sound than the GI, although it doesn't have as much top end brightness.

## Classic Distortion

This pedal is released intermittently for charity and will hopefully become a full time addition to the range one day.

It features eight controls to maximise the flexibility and depth of sound that a player can extract from this pedal. The player is able to adjust gain, volume, low, mid and high tone controls, as well as three specialist controls – presence (which adjusts brightness), character (which gives the pre gain signal a bass boost) and symmetry (which controls the style of clipping leading to a looser sound of the distortion and sonic effect).

It's a beautifully smooth distortion at one end of the spectrum and a hard edged paint stripping beast at the other – great for heavy grunge power chording with the gain turned up and the bass turned down. It has a wide gain control offering everything from a great clean boost which kept the integrity of the sound of the guitar and allowed its strings to chime to wild sustain for lead work.

## Verdict:

MI Audio have started what we hope will be a long-standing and illustrious career in boutique pedal manufacture. They have provided the Australian market with a range of quality hand-built pedals at affordable prices, easily challenging their famous overseas counterparts. These pedals have miles of tone and should find a home in the pedal racks of any guitarist looking for a quality overdrive sound.

The distortions were smooth. The pedals were loud. The controls were easy to master. Within two minutes of connecting each pedal we were able to find a sound that was so powerful that it practically spoke to the guitar. We can only look forward to where MI Audio's designs go from here. **A**

**MI AUDIO OVERDRIVE PEDALS**  
**Tube Zone Overdrive**  
**PRICE:** \$269.95

**Crunch Box Distortion**  
**PRICE:** \$159.95

**Blue Boy Deluxe**  
**PRICE:** \$199.95

**Blues Pro Overdrive**  
**PRICE:** \$159.95

**GI Fuzz**  
**PRICE:** \$199.95

**Neo Fuzz**  
**PRICE:** \$249.95

**Classic Distortion**  
**PRICE:** \$299

**ORIGIN:** All made in Australia

**MI Audio**  
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MI Audio pedals:  
Good enough to eat... almost

