Analogman Boss DS-1 v Keeley v MIJ v MIT

by **Clean Channel** » 09 Apr 2013, 13:56

Hey all,

Below is a well-written post from TGP comparing four different DS-1 pedals. I invited the reviewer (user name nickbeatnik) to join here and post, but while he appreciated the offer, he said he really doesn't use forums very often, and thus wasn't interested. He did say however that he was more than happy to grant his permission to re-post his review, so here it is!

Review copied from TGP below...

I know there's a lot of discussion about different versions of the trusty old Boss DS-1 so I thought I'd add my impressions here.

There have always been electronics wizards you could find to mod your gear, but the rise of boutique pedal makers selling production pedals available for anyone is very recent. In the decades before them I used a stock DS-1 live for nearly 20 years as my main distortion sound. I got away with it because I favoured deep and mellow sounding vintage tube amps, and played loud enough that the power tube saturation smoothed over the natural harshness of the pedal. For recording I pretty much always used the amp breakup of a JCM800 or Vox AC30TB. As my guitars and ears got better I wanted to hear the tone of my instruments more than the DS-1 so I turned the distortion down, right to the minimum, and got a dirty boost. It still wasn't great at low volumes tho.

I abandoned the DS-1 years ago in the search for a more natural, dynamic overdrive, but now a couple of bands I play for need an old school Marshall type lead sound - aggressive, chunky, but smooth and harmonically rich, a little squeezy but not too compressed and narrow sounding. So after trying dozens of boutique distortions I've gone back to the Marshall In A Box sound of the DS-1. I have four versions of the DS-1, an original MIJ, a mid 80s MIT, the Keeley SEM Ultra, the Analogman Pro Midrange Mod.

* **MIT DS-1** - As we all know it has that nasty fizzy top end that sounds terrrible in amps with any presence, and noticeably cuts low frequencies from your guitar. It has a flat, transistor tone, lacking dynamics. There is a very very narrow range where the tone control sounds OK between about 10-11 oclock, otherwise it cuts too much or adds harsh presence and fizz. This is the worst sounding version of the DS-1.

* **Keeley SEM Ultra DS-1** - This sounds great at bedroom levels but doesn't cut it live. Too scooped, too lacking in punch, and the tone control doesn't do much to help. He has tamed the fizz and opened up the low end, but it's an odd sounding distortion now. Reminds me of a 50s tweed style sound, ragged, too much bloom in the low end. The SEM emulates tube sag but in a different way, it doesn't feel right, it recovers too quickly or something, almost pulses. Ultra setting is more modern and tight, but still too soft somehow. In the end this version does not do the Marshall in a box type sound that I personally associate the DS-1 with. No matter how much level I give the output, when I kick in this pedal live my guitar disappears.

* **MIJ DS-1** - This is much much better than the MIT version. It actually boosts low end a little and the high frequencies are not as harsh and fizzy. It's warmer and more dynamic, but still has the Marshall like crunch and tightness. Again the tone control is only useful below 11 oclock, beyond that it gets nasty, but not as nasty as the MIT. I prefer this version to the Keeley, it sounds better live and responds with a punchy aggressive tightness, like a JCM800. If this was all I had I could be happy with it. It needs the old 12V power supply so you have to have it in a chain with a modern Boss to regulate the 9v for it, or run it off a battery.

* **Analogman DS-1 Pro Midrange** - This is my favourite sounding version, and the most useful live. It is an improvement on the MIJ, but not massively different, it still sounds like a good DS-1, just better. The fizz in the high freqs is tamed, the tone control now has a much wider useful range and none of the nastiness of the other versions. It does not give that slight boost in the bottom end like my MIJ, which is a good thing for me because it avoids getting flubby without cutting lows. The mid control doesn't add any harshness. In my Fender amp the mids feel neither boosted or cut around 9 oclock on the dial, below that gives a slight scoop but not as much as the MIJ. Overall this version is very true to the sound of my guitars and has the most versatile and useful tone controls with the added mid. It can be set to give a huge mid boost, but not a TS style one that cuts all the lows. It sounds like a wider Q than a TS, and that's a good thing to my ears. It's more dynamic than my MIJ but still slightly compresses, with that tightness you want from a cranked amp giving tube compression. At stage volumes I can really hear the quality of this version, it has none of that brittleness that feels like the presence on your amp is too high, it cuts through the band well but without needing a massive hump of mids to do it. I'm not a fan of TS type pedals.

I'm a career musician who plays around 50 shows a year here in Australia. I've played on over 20 releases in the

last 20 years, and toured a dozen countries. I also work as an audio engineer and have produced releases for quite a few bands. I have used a lot of different equipment, but currently my guitars are - USA Strat, USA Jazzmaster, Gibson Howard Roberts Fusion III, Danelectro DC59, Silvertone Jupiter Stratotone. The amps I use are a Fender Custom 64 VIbroverb, Marshall JCM800, Vox AC30TB (UK). My live pedalboard is - Fulltone Clyde Deluxe wah, Fulltone Fat Boost FB3, Keeley Mod Blues Driver, Analogman DS-1, tuner. I have also owned and used a LOT of drive pedals to compare, including OCD, Mesa V-Twin, Big Muff NYC and green Russian, Duncan JH-2S Classic Fuzz, EHX English Muffn, original TS9, MXR Dist +, Boss OD3, Z Vex Box of Rock...

I need a distortion pedal to give me a tight, aggressive but smooth lead sound, with all the high harmonics intact, and some of the dynamic response of a tube amp, without over-writing the tonal signature of my very nice guitars or my hand-wired amp. The Analogman DS-1 does it for me.

Clean Channel

Re: Analogman Boss DS-1 v Keeley v MIJ v MIT

by **71Smallbox** » 09 Apr 2013, 16:04

I completely disagree in regard to the MIT 80's DS-1. I compared a 1980 SS MIJ DS-1 to an early production MIT black label and they sounded exactly the same. I take all reviews on TGP with a huge grain of salt, many times it seem like they're trying to justify the high prices paid for items by letting it influence their reveiw.

71Smallbox

Re: Analogman Boss DS-1 v Keeley v MIJ v MIT

by **Clean Channel** » 09 Apr 2013, 16:18

In this fellas defense, he only has three posts on TGP, is a new member, and perhaps doesn't deserve to be lumped in to your TGP stereotype.

Clean Channel

Re: Analogman Boss DS-1 v Keeley v MIJ v MIT

by **71Smallbox** » 09 Apr 2013, 16:28

Well, in this guys defense, if he isn't powering the 80's MIT exactly the same as the MIJ, then it would DEFINATELY sound different. Older MIT are ACA power supply just like the MIJ.

71Smallbox

Re: Analogman Boss DS-1 v Keeley v MIJ v MIT

by **BearBoy** » 09 Apr 2013, 19:12

Early MIT ones should sound the same as MIJ ones, it's only after 1994 that they changed:

> *BossArea wrote:*
> *The design of the DS-1 has changed little throughout its lifetime but the opamp the circuit is based around has changed several times. From 1978, the DS-1 was using the Toshiba TA7136AP opamp. This remained unchanged for about 16 years but in 1994 it was replaced by the Rohm BA728N. In 2000 the opamp was again changed. This time the Mitsubishi M5223AL was used. The last change came 2006 when the New Japan Radio NJM2904L opamp was introduced.*

Maybe he meant mid 90s, not mid 80s?

BearBoy

Re: Analogman Boss DS-1 v Keeley v MIJ v MIT

by **Guga Ramone** » 09 Apr 2013, 21:07

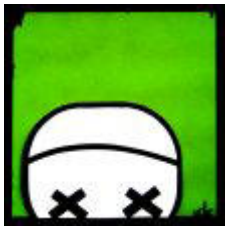
BTW, last week I borrowed my friend's DS-1 (very recent production) and compared to my 88 Black Label DS-1. I simply can't hear all those differences that everybody talks about! The older one (same circuit as the MIJ) has a little darker tone in the same settings as the newer one. But if I lower the tone on the newer one, they are almost identical and I really doubt one could tell the difference in a band situation.

Guga Ramone

Re: Analogman Boss DS-1 v Keeley v MIJ v MIT

by **natthu** » 09 Apr 2013, 22:18

There is definitely a difference between MIJ, Keeley Mod and a new DS-1, but I have no experience of anything in between.
Having said that, they do all have that "DS-1 sound", and I think you're probably right in saying that in the context of a band it would be hard to tell the difference.



natthu

Re: Analogman Boss DS-1 v Keeley v MIJ v MIT

by **Clean Channel** » 10 Apr 2013, 01:15

Personally, I never A/Bd an old and new DS-1. I'll pick up a MIT sometime soon and decide for myself. I'll be sure to report back!

Clean Channel

Re: Analogman Boss DS-1 v Keeley v MIJ v MIT

by **Clean Channel** » 07 May 2013, 02:22

As of tonight I have these three fellas in house. I'll be able to play them side by side tomorrow and (finally) make my own judgments on whether or not they differ.

I'll be sure to report back!

Clean Channel

Re: Analogman Boss DS-1 v Keeley v MIJ v MIT

by **71Smallbox** » 07 May 2013, 02:28

For an honest appraisal, you'll need the MIT with the same circuit as the MIJ(pre 94). You don't have all of the versions for comparison.

71Smallbox

Re: Analogman Boss DS-1 v Keeley v MIJ v MIT

by **Clean Channel** » 07 May 2013, 02:41

Ok Smallbox, I'll leave that one up to you. I'm only interested in comparing recent production DS-1s with old MIJ. Feel free to take any of my comments with a grain of your TGP salt.

Clean Channel

Re: Analogman Boss DS-1 v Keeley v MIJ v MIT

by **Clean Channel** » 07 May 2013, 16:39

Quick back story on why I have the three DS-1s: I've had the '83 DS-1 for quite some time, and a while back picked up the silver screw DS-1 only because it popped up for sale locally for a good price. I had never A/B'd them with a current MIT DS-1, and decided to grab one the next time I saw one nearby for a good price.

There's no difference in sound between my two MIJ DS-1s. The MIT does sound noticeably different. In short: at higher gain settings the MIJ DS-1s have better bass response and better note definition. The MIT got a little too buzzy for my taste.

If I happen to run in to a 80s MIT DS-1, I'll grab it and compare it to my MIJs.

Clean Channel