Qualitative Sound Ratings for Distortion Pedals

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Qualitative Sound Ratings for Distortion Pedals

by **zentropa** » 25 Jul 2012, 19:18

For a few years I've been contemplating a way to "rate" pedal's characteristics qualitatively and I finally started to jot down some ideas. It should make it easier to give recommendations or chase the sound you want if people end up being in agreement about (most) of them.

Going to probably start piecing them together soon (as I don't have time to now) but I did come up with some of the categories.

Drive Color. This is sort of what separates "overdrives" from "distortions". I tend to see it as sort of "warmth vs. fizz."
On a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 being the warmest and 10 being the fizziest.
A few examples: BD-2 = 1, OD-3 = 2, SD-1 = 4, DS-1 = 6, HM-2 = 8, MT-2 = 10

Signal Saturation. How much original guitar sound is still present in the tone, aka how different do a $2000 guitar and $100 guitar sound with this pedal through the same amp.
On a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 being the most original signal and 10 being the most "masked."
A few examples: BD-2 = 1, SD-1 = 3, MT-2 = 9, FZ-2 = 10

Virtual Gain Potential. How much amp gain is the pedal trying to simulate?
On a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being highest gain.
A few examples: BD-2 = 1, SD-1 = 4, DS-1 = 7, MT-2 = 10

Tone Bias. How biased towards bass or treble is this pedal? This is strikingly apparent when playing at lower volumes.
On a scale of -3 to +3 with -3 being the most bass heavy and +3 being the most treble heavy and 0 being completely neutral.
A few examples: OD-3 = -3, SD-1 = -1, DS-1 = +1, MT-2 = +3

Boost Potential. This covers both volume gain potential and ability to "cut."
On a scale of -2 to +3 with 3 being the most boost.
A few examples: OD-2 Turbo = -2, SD-1 = -1, current DS-1 = +1 (there were versions I would rate this at 0 or -1), HM-2 = +1, OD-3 = +1

Volume Dependence. How necessary is a high volume for this pedal to sound good?
On a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being "needs the most volume" to sound good.

Compression. How compressed does the tone feel?
On a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being the most compressed sounding.

I don't have time to do the last examples right now. I will try to finish this up a bit later and give a few pedals full ratings.

Last edited by zentropa on 26 Jul 2012, 00:04, edited 1 time in total.

zentropa
Posts: 530
Joined: 24 Jul 2012, 07:47

Re: Qualatative Sound Ratings for Distortion Pedals

by **nathanscribe** » 25 Jul 2012, 19:30

Interesting. Seems like an expanded version of the chart in the Boss Book, if you know it.

nathanscribe
BOSS SEXY!!!
Posts: 612
Joined: 23 Nov 2011, 19:49
Location: Yorkshire, UK

Re: Qualatative Sound Ratings for Distortion Pedals

by **sclitheroe** » 25 Jul 2012, 21:02

You think a BD-2 has less gain and more warmth than an SD-1? Or am I reading this wrong? Or maybe my definitions need calibrating?

sclitheroe
Posts: 1453
Joined: 25 Nov 2011, 21:02
Location: Stoney Creek

Re: Qualitative Sound Ratings for Distortion Pedals

by **zentropa** » 26 Jul 2012, 07:59

nathanscribe: I'm familiar with the chart. I've just found a few things that can't be categorized in 2 dimensions.

sclitheroe: IMO, the BD-2 is fairly "sharp" on its attack but (with the possible exception of the DN-2) it is also has a very mild drive to it.

warm drive, low gain potential, low signal saturation. i would give it a +2 tone bias (treble oriented) and a positive boost rating (i haven't owned one in a while and can't remember it well enough to nail down a solid number on it).
compression i would give it a 2. volume dependence i would give it a 3.

I consider the harsh bite at higher volumes to be more a factor of its tone bias than it's drive character... the harshness feels more like boosted clean treble if that makes any sense.

Here's a couple of complete pedal ratings:

Classics:
DS-1 V1 MIJ - DC: 6, SS: 6, VGP: 7, TB: 0, BP: +1, VD: 1, CMP: 3
DS-1 V1 MIT - DC: 6, SS: 7, VGP: 7, TB: +1, BP: +1, VD: 1, CMP: 2
DS-1 V2/V3 - DC: 6, SS: 7, VGP: 7, TB: +1, BP: -1, VD: 1, CMP: 2
DS-1 V4 - DC: 6, SS: 7, VGP: 7, TB: +1, BP: +1, VD: 1, CMP 2

SD-1 Silver Screw - DC: 4, SS: 3, VGP: 4, TB: -1, BP: 0, VD: 2, CMP: 2
SD-1 later - DC: 4, SS: 4, VGP: 4, TB: -1, BP: -1, VD: 2, CMP: 3

OD-1 SS 455BD - DC: 3, SS: 2, VGP: 3, TB: 0, BP: +2, VD: 3, CMP: 1
OD-1 BS 455BD - DC: 3, SS: 3, VGP: 3, TB: -1, BP: +1, VD: 3, CMP: 2
OD-1 BS 455BDD - DC: 4, SS: 4, VGP: 4, TB: 0, BP: 0, VD: 2, CMP: 3

Distortions:
MT-2 - DC: 10, SS: 9, VGP: 10, TB: +3, BP: +3, VD: 4, CMP: 5
HM-2 - DC: 5, SS: 8, VGP: 9, TB: +3, BP: 0, VD: 2, CMP: 2
ML-2: DC: 8, SS: 9, VGP: 10, TB: +2, BP: +2, VD: 1, CMP: 3
HM-3: DC: 9, SS: 10, VGP: 10, TB: +3, BP: +1, VD: 3, CMP: 4
XT-2: DC 7, SS: 8, VGP: 8, TB: +2, BP: 0, VD: 3, CMP: 2
DS-2 Turbo mode: DC: 7, SS: 6, VGP: 6, TB: +3, BP: +3, VD: 4, CMP: 2
PW-2: DC: 6, SS: 8, VGP: 9, TB: -2, BP: ??, VD: 4, CMP: 5

Overdrives:
OD-3 - DC: 2, SS: 2, VGP: 2, TB: -3, BP: +2, VD: 3, CMP: 2
OD-2 Turbo mode - DC: 4, SS: 7, VGP: 7, TB: -1, BP: -2, VD: 1, CMP: 3
SD-2 Lead mode - DC: 6, SS: 7, VGP: 8, TB: +1, BP: +2, VD: 1, CMP: 2
BD-2 - DC: 1, SS: 1, VGP: 1, TB: +2, BP: +2, VD: 4, CMP: 1

Other:
FZ-2 Mode 1: DC: 10, SS: 10, VGP: 10, TB: +3, BP: +3, VD: 5, CMP: 5
FZ-3: DC: 10, SS: 8, VGP: 10, TB: +3, BP: +1, VD: 5, CMP: 4

I can tell my memory is sucking now since I went back and forth on a few of these... several years ago this would have been super easy.
I may edit this post and tweak them a bit somewhere down the road.

zentropa
Posts: 530
Joined: 24 Jul 2012, 07:47

Re: Qualitative Sound Ratings for Distortion Pedals

by **Guga Ramone** » 26 Jul 2012, 17:13

Hey, this is a really complex system, but very complete and provides LOTS of info! I really appreciate it!
But why not put every parameter on a scale from 0 to 10? I guess its much more easier to learn and read.

Anyway, good work!!

Guga Ramone
Posts: 388
Joined: 07 Dec 2011, 18:02
Location: Curitiba - Brazil

Re: Qualitative Sound Ratings for Distortion Pedals

by **zentropa** » 27 Jul 2012, 03:57

Thanks, Guga.

I had originally planned on going 1 to 10 but a few things jumped up...

things like tone bias and boost make more sense with neutral as 0 and going + or - whereas something like gain potential really goes from 0 to 10, but since it's distortion, I figured starting at 1 made more sense than 0.

Other categories would get way too specific when that level of differentiation isn't necessary. Add in the fact that I only currently own 3 distortion pedals, greater accuracy on the categories that have a smaller spread would require me to play them again. Even if I did have every pedal in front of me, keeping some of those categories less specific would keep my OCD in check.

zentropa
Posts: 530
Joined: 24 Jul 2012, 07:47

Re: Qualitative Sound Ratings for Distortion Pedals

by **visserman** » 27 Jul 2012, 15:56

Hello Zen,

Very deep posts from you Sir, great!! .....No time to read though!!....but will make time to Play!!
Been a while eh, since you were last seen on the Bossforum?

Keep em coming!!

My opinions about this matter? Very simple: Boss produces a lot of dirt pedals, they are all the same with the difference that some of them go a bit further (think scale of 10 and upwards.....) compared to some others.
They are all good (or bad) depending on your mood of the day. Hey, I could say the same about Marshall/Fender amps.....

Once you have tried (and .....Used) them all for some time, go back to your amps and see how you feel about their distortions, or just there plain, simple sound.

Overal the world is quite happy, since Boss started producing their little yellow overdrive in 1979 and more colour was added over the course of time, and from time to time the great boss revisists his older products, dabses them up with some new shiny chips and brings them out under a different number. And we remain happy, since we, musicians and guitarplayers of the day, need choice and things to collect (read:gather dust in the Sun).

Keep playing and remain upbeat!! And hopefully you will stay around for a while this time.
If you happen to leave us here, do not forget to mention where you hang out, as I am sure, some of us would like to hang out there as well!
Now have a beer on all the dear members of this house

visserman
BOSS EXPERTAAR!!!
Posts: 948
Joined: 09 Dec 2011, 15:46
Location: Leeds, West Yorkshire, England, UK

Re: Qualitative Sound Ratings for Distortion Pedals

by **zentropa** » 27 Jul 2012, 16:00

Thanks, viss.

When I take hiatuses from here (I've had 2 extended ones) I tend to not play any guitar at all but pursue other hobbies during that time until something inspires me to play again.

My inner nerd makes me classify and categorize things. I used to have a similar rating system for pickups :p

zentropa
Posts: 530
Joined: 24 Jul 2012, 07:47

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