Qualitative differences in pedal era

by **zentropa** » 04 Nov 2015, 21:58

I've ebbed and flowed with pedal accumulation and purges about 4 times in the past 20 years. This past set I finally paid much closer attention to the eras and was able to A/B a lot more things than I had before when I would work off of memory.

This time through I've noticed a few things that seem to be symbolic of each era of pedal, probably due to the components being used in them.

Some of these may be fairly broad generalizations but they seem to hold true with my experiences. A few of the models I've recently gone through 4-5 of trying to find one I want to keep.

I. Ink Stamp batch #. These are all silver screw but there are silver screw with the paper serial #.
-All of these have pedal casings that seem to be about 1mm wider than the other pedals and tend to be a tight fit when putting them into a BCB-3/30/6/6G that isn't "broken in."

-Modulation effects tend to have a few interesting behaviors:
1. They all seem to have a noticeable volume boost, especially in lower frequencies.
2. The effects tend to feel mid-scooped in the wet signal. That is, you'll hear the effect in the low and high end but it feels mostly dry through the mids.
3. The effects tend to feel very warm and full, but also very mild.
4. The effected sound actually feels larger sonically than the dry signal. This never made much sense to me but it's probably due to the boost.
5. The modulation wave seems to want to press through when they are on and you aren't playing anything (noticeable if you use a noise gate).

I've only owned 1 ink stamp Dirt box so I can't make any useful observations there.

II. Early Black Label w/ paper serial #.
-Modulations Compared to ink stamp they:
1. Have a smaller volume boost (but still there).
2. Have a similar type mid-scoop but the effect is a bit more pronounced, creeping more noticeably into the lower and upper mids.
3. The "larger than dry" type effect doesn't happen with these.
4. These don't have the same issue in #5 that the ink stamps.

-Dirt (up through ~1986).
1. Crunchy and tight.
2. Fairly quiet when it is active and not being played.
3. Very good low end signal.
4. Medium amounts of compression.

III. Green label era / Later Black Label w/ paper serial #
-Modulations:
1. Volume boost stays about the same as the earlier black.
2. Effect seems to hit all frequencies, including through the mids... making it feel a bit more "in your face."
3. Slightly brighter on the high end.

-Dirt (Not sure exactly when this transition seemed to happen but it seems around late 87 until the MIT transition)
1. These seem to have a lot less edge definition than the earlier versions. Smoother on the attack but have a tendency to feel a little bit saggy as well. Less compression than earlier versions.
2. These seem to have better low end response than the earlier versions.
3. The bypass seems slightly better.
4. These tend to be whisper quiet when on and nothing is being played.

IV. MIT Transition era w/ paper serial #.
-Modulations:
1. Less volume boost than MIJ's.
2. Effect seems focused in the mids and highs.
3. Less low end.

-Dirt:
1. These behave similarly to the 87-89 MIJ's in that they are smoother with less edge definition than earlier

versions.
2. A bit noisier than previous MIJ's.
3. Less low end note definition. Gets a bit muddy in the low mids.

V. Early MIT (ACA-era still in effect) with serial # on the bottom plate.
-Modulations:
1. Even more mid and high effect. Low end seems a bit squished.
2. This is the first era where I really notice the buffer. It adds a bit of "plink" to the note attack.
3. The effects are no longer mild but fully "in your face."
4. They are still fuller and warmer than the later PSA converted MIT's.

-Dirt:
1. Huge amounts of compression.
2. Very noisy compared to all previous versions (hiss).
3. Very crunchy, moreso than previous versions. Some models can get a bit "grindy" feeling.
4. More prone to feedback issues.
5. Low end suck when the effect is active.
6. Muddier and less string articulation.

zentropa

Re: Qualitative differences in pedal era

by **zentropa** » 06 Nov 2015, 17:45

Probably should have noted in the early MIT era dirt boxes that the ones with serial numbers that are prone to fading seem to be the ones that have increased compression, more gain, more hiss, and are more prone to feedback.

zentropa

Re: Qualitative differences in pedal era

by **Dirk** » 07 Nov 2015, 09:22

That's quite an elaborate list you've got going there, Zentropa.
Maybe this should go in a knowledge sticky?

Dirk

Re: Qualitative differences in pedal era

by **zentropa** » 07 Nov 2015, 13:24

Thanks. Not sure it's 100% accurate tho. Was curious if anyone else has had similar results.

zentropa

Re: Qualitative differences in pedal era

by **visserman** » 10 Nov 2015, 11:57

It is a very detailed list of various sonic issues you looked at. Also you compare the whole period of the Boss pedal range. All of this makes it much harder to do A/B checks. Yes it is possible but takes a lot of time and you can ask yourself: "What is the point of doing all this research?"

I have done a lot of tests myself, and some of the things you have observed I have noticed for myself as well. Over time you get to know how particular pedals behave and accept their shortfalls (or at least that is how I approach it)

If you keep a small list of things of what to check for within a small amount of pedals, the A/B checks are easier and you will remember the differences.

To check for these differences is one thing, to use the pedals for unique sounds is another issue.

Another point is: Once you have done some of those checks it may be useful to look at other pedals of a different brand and see how well they compare to the Boss pedals.

I think for most of us here the bottom line with Boss is: They are relatively small, there is a Boss pedal for almost any effect and any playing situation, whether the Boss pedals are the best choice around is another issue but because of their compactness and reliability most of us like using them.

visserman

Re: Qualitative differences in pedal era

by **zentropa** » 10 Nov 2015, 17:42

A lot of this was for my own reference... get it in print somewhere that I can look at somewhere down the road when it was still relatively fresh in my mind (e.g. I doubt there will be another time when I have 4 different HM-2's simultaneously again). I figure it might serve as a reference for some, e.g. for subtle modulation effects go older, for more in your face modulations shoot for ACA Taiwan, less volume boost go PSA Taiwan, etc. All of the 1988 or later MIJ dirt boxes I've played recently have all been saggy/flabby, etc. so if you want maximum crunch shoot for '87 at the latest for MIJ or "faded serial" MIT if you don't mind the extra noise and compression.

On the upside, each "era jump" seems to shift things by 1 notch. If someone wants to pick up a 2nd that is significantly different, they may be better off going 3-4 notches away. My current restock was trying to avoid any duplicates but I did make 2 exceptions: Ink Stamp BF-2 vs. ACA MIT BF-2 and BL CE-3 vs. MIT CE-3. I think the jumps across these eras are so huge on these pedals that it's hard to believe they are supposed to be EQ'd the same.

zentropa

Re: Qualitative differences in pedal era

by **Dirk** » 10 Nov 2015, 18:48

All this makes me wonder: how big is your collection?

Dirk

Re: Qualitative differences in pedal era

by **zentropa** » 10 Nov 2015, 19:14

Not too overkill compared to what I have seen.
I sell off the stuff I don't keep and go through phases depending upon my financial situation and/or depression :P

Currently at:
-32 pedals on hand (duplicates are: TU-2 x 2, PSM-5 x 2, BF-2 x 2, CE-3 x 2)
-2 up for sale (not counted in the total). Debating a 3rd (TR-2)
-1 on the way (PH-1)

Part of how I have a lot of these experiences is because of purging a batch and replacing them 3-5 years later. It's gotten much more difficult to do this so I'm pretty much keeping everything that is getting used.

That being said, I've had at least 6 of about a dozen models, especially the common mod pedals (SD-1/DS-1/MT-2).

zentropa