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Radial Bassbone OD

Overdrive, EQ & DI Box For Bass Guitar

CHRIS KORFF

The Bassbone OD, from highly regarded Canadian gizmo-builders Radial, combines a preamp, overdrive, equaliser, DI box and switcher/combiner, which can accommodate a broad range of signal types. As you'd expect from Radial, the build quality is excellent: it's reassuringly weighty, and all the knobs and switches have a solid, consistent feel.

Two quarter-inch jack inputs, designated A and B, are intended either for two separate instruments (should you want to switch basses between songs) or for acoustic/upright basses fitted with two pickups. The outputs are made up of an XLR (DI) socket, an instrument-level jack out (for your amp), a tuner output and a mini-jack headphone socket. There's also an effects-pedal loop, comprising a jack input and a jack output.

The top of the pedal is home to three footswitches and a goodly number of controls. The footswitches, from right to left, mute the outputs (except for the tuner out), select between inputs A and B, and switch the overdrive and/or the effects loop into circuit (its behaviour

Is this the ultimate Swiss Army knife for bassists?

depending on the position of an attendant three-way slider switch).

Inputs A and B each have a set of four controls: low, mid, high and gain. The mid bands can each adjust one of three frequencies (250Hz, 500Hz or 1kHz), as determined by a slider switch, and each channel has a high-pass filter switch, with options for flat, 80Hz and 150Hz. Finally, the overdrive section's controls comprise drive, mix (a wet/dry control) and tone.

Three of the four edges of the Bassbone OD are peppered with mini pots and switches, most of which require either a screwdriver to turn or a small pointy thing to push, so they're best considered as 'set and forget' controls.

Next to input A is a recessed button marked PZB, which ups the input sensitivity by 10dB, and also increases the input impedance from 220k Ω to 10M Ω , in order to better accommodate piezo pickups. Input B has two 'hidden' controls: a Blend button (which mixes inputs A and B and obviates the A/B footswitch for the two-pickup scenario I mentioned earlier), and a Drag pot, which provides

a continuously variable input impedance (from 22k Ω to 1.8M Ω). This is intended to accommodate the wide range of impedances that different types of pickup (from vintage passives to modern actives) are best presented with.

Around the back is a pot for the headphone level (which has a flathead screw slot but can be easily turned with a shortish thumbnail), recessed polarity-invert switches for both input B and the DI output, a pre/post-processing switch for the DI out, and a ground-lift switch. The rear is where you'll also find the 15V DC input for the included PSU. The final 'hidden' control is found between the tuner and main outputs, and this, when pressed in, keeps the effects loop in circuit permanently, regardless of the status of the overdrive footswitch.

In Use

Happily, the Bassbone OD sounds as good as it is versatile. Even as a straightforward DI it seems to add a hint of flattery, mostly in the form of a little lower-mid thickness and HF smoothness, which combine to fill



Radial Bassbone OD £289

PROS

- Solidly built.
- Highly flexible and well thought-out feature set.
- A versatile range of sounds.

CONS

- Headphone output distorts when using overdrive or high input gain.

SUMMARY

Depending on what you already use, this pedal could either lie at the heart of, or replace almost entirely, your bass front-end. Highly recommended!

out the sound without dulling it. There's also apparently plenty of headroom — I can be quite an aggressive player when I get excited, and many a cheap DI I've played through has shown its weaknesses in this regard, but not this one.

The EQs are very usable, with the high and low bands allowing plenty of broad adjustments, and the mid frequencies being well chosen: the 250Hz option is great for either adding 'tubbiness' or creating a modern 'scooped' sound, and the 500Hz and 1kHz good for adding or removing varying degrees of mid-range note definition or 'finger clack', respectively.

My 1978 Fender Jazz seemed to respond well to adjustments to the Drag control, with higher impedance settings sounding a little more responsive and 'zingy' than lower ones (though the differences are subtle).

The overdrive, meanwhile, is a creamy affair: there's never any 'fizz' evident (even at high drive and tone settings), but you can achieve anything from gentle euphonic distortion to a dirty, yet still smooth,

valve-like drive. The Mix control also lets you be subtle with it, so that you can keep the necessary low-end weight while still giving the impression of a brutally overdriven amp.

Clearly, Radial have thought about this unit a lot. It solves a lot of problems — you can EQ the FOH DI feed, switch instruments without embarrassing cable swaps or level changes and engage your effects with one switch — but it's also a very good-quality sound-shaping device. The overdrive serves a broad range of styles thanks to the Mix control, and the Drag function adds yet more (subtle) scope for tone adjustment. If I have a complaint, it's that it's not possible to adjust the output level of the overdriven signal — it's always slightly louder than when the unit is set to 'clean' — but then I suppose that is exactly how most players would use it, and that being the case the amount of level jump is well chosen.

The only real shortcoming I found was in the headphone amp: at higher input-gain or drive settings, it had a tendency to clip quite nastily. This

Alternatives

The obvious competitor is **Tech 21's SansAmp Bass Driver DI**, which covers a lot of the same ground but lacks the input switching/combining. If it's just overdrive you want, then the **EBS ValveDrive DI** would be a worthy option, whereas if you're not an overdrive user at all, you might consider the 'vanilla' (non-OD) **Bassbone**.

wouldn't be too troublesome for basic 'clean' practising, but rather limits your ability to set the unit up on headphones before going on stage.

That aside, if you're a bassist who plays live and uses an overdrive pedal — and likes the sound of this one — then the Bassbone OD is something to aspire to. The build quality, sound and features all add up to give the impression of a trustworthy, workmanlike device that nonetheless has a degree of class. ■■■

£ £289 including VAT.

T Shure Distribution +44 (0)1992 703058

E info@shuredistribution.co.uk

W www.shuredistribution.co.uk

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