

# Dirt Class

Regular distortion box just not cutting it for you?

Perhaps sir would like to sample something a little more exclusive. Step this way, says **Mick Taylor**



**T**wo sure signs that somebody is Very Serious about tone: 1) They charge more than £200 for a distortion box, and 2) They recommend carbon-zinc 9V batteries instead of alkaline because the former 'sound better'. Blimey.

So the story goes for high-end pedal guru Mike Fuller, designer and boss at Fulltone Musical Products from, yes, you guessed it, California.

Lest we be facetious – you'll find the likes of Larry Carlton, Robben Ford, Mike Landau, Dan Huff and Eric Johnson among many, many others using

Fulltone pedals, so Mr F is clearly getting something right.

While the company produces all manner of dynamic and modulation effects for your aural adventures, today's tone bus is destined for dirt central. All aboard for the finest filth...

#### CONSTRUCTION

Mr Fuller doesn't do things by half. Both the Full-Drive 2 and Distortion Pro pedals are



between different kinds of 9V batteries? Make up your own mind – it's taking things a bit too far into 'dog ears' territory for this reviewer.

## FEATURES & SOUNDS FULL-DRIVE 2

The key feature that will draw plenty of potential customers to the FD-2 is its ability to give you two sounds. First is the regular drive tone (with the left-hand, green LED lit) and then you can also select 'boost' (right-hand, red LED) for an additional kick in both level and drive.

Top panel controls are minimal. Volume governs overall level; tone gets progressively more trebly left to right; overdrive gives you grit, and boost regulates the extra push for the 'boost' mode. There's a lot of everything on tap, enabling huge leaps in both volume and gain, so go easy when plugging in at first.

The only slightly fiddly feature to be found here is the push/pull 'Comp-Cut' control on the volume pot, which we'll explain presently...

If you use a distortion box to radically alter your sound – ie for death metal scoop or super square-wave fuzz – the Full-Drive 2 will not appeal. Instead what you get is a damn near pant-wettingly transparent, musical kick to your basic tone. For example with a Stratocaster, your clean tone fattens out in all the right areas, adding grit from barely detectable to a thick and heavy crunch, yet always maintaining much of your guitar's inherent woodiness and spank. With the 'comp cut' pot pulled, each note has more edge for a strident, glassy attack that Texas blues fans in particular will love. Pushed back in, there's more compression and this will be a boon if you're trying to tame an aggressive sounding amp such as a modern 50-watt Plexi at sensible volumes.

The boost feature adds both gain and level, so you can go from barely

housed in a heavy duty steel chassis, and use incredibly sturdy pots and switches, all of which are secured and locked to the chassis, rather than dangling there ready to get snapped off. Top quality jack sockets, custom-designed switches and circuit boards and the whole thing hand wired and assembled – these really are boutique pedals, even if it is a hackneyed term.

One thing Fulltone is particularly proud of is its 'True Bypass' circuitry. Fuller is adamant that while many

## FULL-DRIVE 2 GOLD STARS

- ★ Fabulous, transparent tone
- ★ Two sounds in one pedal
- ★ Excellent build quality

## BLACK MARKS

- Necessarily pricey

## Ideal for...

Any blues/rock 'n' roll fan looking for an exceptional drive unit

**...There's a lot of everything on tap, enabling huge leaps in both volume and gain..."**



products claim this feature, his are the only pedals that include the Fulltone 3PDT 'Super-Duty Triple Pole Double Throw' footswitch... Eh?

The argument goes that many pedals feature a buffered output which 'destroys' your natural tone when the pedal is off. With the 3PDT, Fuller is claiming "the most transparent bypassed tone you can get, period."

It's a bold claim, and while we've no way of measuring it accurately, a quick A/B test through either pedal and straight into the amp reveals, well, very little in terms of difference between the no-effect tones. I tried the same test using an MXR Distortion+ I had to hand, and fair dos, Fuller has a point. There's definitely a slight loss of signal and a little high end with the MXR pedal.

While it might sound crazy, and as hinted at in the introduction, power supply makes a discernible difference to how a pedal sounds. Actually, it's not crazy at all – stuff 18 volts in the front (Fuller suggests you experiment with the Full-Drive 2) and it's bound to cook a bit more. As for the differences



noticeable to a heavy-drive volume leap for The Big Solo. It's a really handy addition, meaning you're getting two sounds in one pedal. Again, single coils work well here, and you can get your Strat or Tele singing with plenty of body.

Switch to a bridge humbucker and things start to melt, not least this reviewer's heart: it's such a pleasure to find real, musical drive in a pedal and still retain all the things you love so much about the guitar in the first place. Fat second- and third-order harmonics induce singing feedback with lots of throaty mid as you wonder where all that sustain came from. Lovely, just lovely.

## DISTORTION PRO

Aiming at the other end of the saturation scale from the Full-Drive 2, the Distortion Pro is a more tweakable, single-sound pedal aimed at the heavier side of life.

The basic tone is somewhat squarer than the Full-Drive 2; as the name suggests it's a more pronounced distortion effect, though highly flexible. The key to that flexibility comes via four mini pots in addition to the overall volume and distortion controls. The latter offer a huge leap in level and global filth control, respectively, but much of the fine tuning is done below.

The general amount of drive and the sponginess with which it reacts to your pick attack is controlled by balancing the main distortion pot and 'saturation'. Roll everything fully right to get a heavily saturated,

## CUT THE MID



The volume knob on the FD-2 has an additional push/pull control called 'comp-cut'. Pulled up it's a less compressed tone for quicker attack and dynamics; for example, when using heavier levels of gain, you may want the sound to be more precise. Pushed in, there's a more compressed feel.

## THE LOWDOWN



### FULLTONE FULL-DRIVE 2

Price: £199

Made in: USA  
Power supply: 9V battery or 9V DC adaptor (not included)  
Effects: Overdrive and boost

Contact: Peach Guitars

Phone: 01376 553016

Web: [www.fulltone.com](http://www.fulltone.com)

GB RATING: **XXXXXXXXXX**



## CLICK, POP



One side effect of the True Bypass switching is that static can build up and cause pops when changing settings. Fulltone recommends you press the switches a few times before powering up your amp. Apparently this releases static and lessens the pops.

# Effects

compressed feel, and back off for more dynamics and edge – despite the fact there are no tubes in it, using the saturation pot judiciously could well convince you otherwise.

The other three are essentially EQ controls, although not in the strict bass, middle and treble sense. 'Resonance' regulates the bottom-end chug; ie for Mesa-style thud, roll it forward, and for 70s Marshall dial it back a little.

But the real tone-shaping fun comes with the 'voicing' and 'highs' controls. By changing the focus of the middle punch and upper registers, it's possible to cover a huge amount of tonal ground with the Distortion Pro. For example, you can dial in some convincing Angus Young rawk, Jimmy Page riffola, Brian May middle honk and sustain, and even Brown-esque Van Halen.

It's a super-sounding pedal all the while, letting your guitar retain its voice, yet adding all the requisite thunk, chunk and slam that you're looking for. It also does a respectable fuzz tone – not the thin, fizzy type, but instead a slightly more palatable version of the f\*\*ked-up Big Muff tone that sounds just great in grunge and aggro-rock.

It'll all take a little while to explore, but there are countless great sounds in here.

## CONCLUSION

£199 seems a lot for a dual-distortion pedal right? Wrong. The Full-Drive 2 will be worth every penny if you currently own something like a Silver Face Twin, Bassman, Marshall Plexi, AC30 or the like and want to turn it into a three-channel super amp. The FD-2 is a perfect partner in such a rig, and yes, despite owning literally umpteen distortion boxes, I was working out finances within seconds of plugging it in. Fulltone is planning an FD-2 update with more features for 2003, so watch this space. The Distortion Pro is a different kettle of kaka altogether. Squarer sounding, ultimately more versatile for all-round rock and therefore – given that most guitar players out there probably aren't die-hard blues fans like me – holds wider appeal, particularly to all you Grohl wannabes. Again, £229 is a serious outlay, but we are talking Very Serious Tone.

## DISTORTION PRO GOLD STARS

- ★ Extremely versatile
- ★ Superb tones

## BLACK MARKS

- Necessarily pricey

## Ideal for...

Classic distortion fans wanting something a bit above the norm



## DETAILS

### POWER TO THE PEDAL



Both pedals here run on either PP9 9V batteries or using a regulated 9V DC power supply (negative centre pin) available from Boss, Ibanez, Voodoo Labs and so on. As mentioned in the main copy, Fulltone suggests you experiment with anything up to 18V for the FD-2 as it changes the character of the sound!

### THE LOWDOWN

#### FULLTONE DISTORTION PRO

Price: £229

Made in: USA  
Power supply: 9V battery or 9V DC adaptor (not included)  
Effects: Distortion

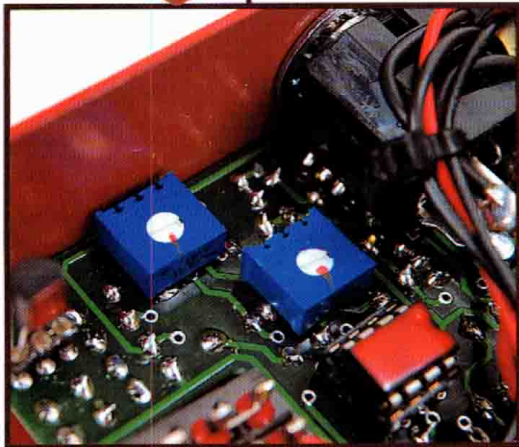
Contact: Peach Guitars

Phone: 01376 553016

Web: www.fulltone.com

GB RATING:

### A LOOK INSIDE



Inside this little fella you'll find two mini trim pots which regulate the amount of gain in the first stage of the pedal and the overall level of midrange and distortion. They're currently factory set, though Fulltone suggests you may want to knock the former back around 1/8th of a turn if you want more definition from your humbuckers. Messing with the latter will change the way the pedal reacts to you backing off the volume on the guitar; ie how much it does or doesn't clean up.