



# Tone Turbo

TIRED OF ORDINARY STOMPBOXES? **PAUL SALTER** TRIES ON BSM FOR SIZE, AND FINDS TONES A PLENTY FOR EVERY EVENTUALITY

Spread out a big bunch of various stompboxes at any guitarist's feet, and it's a safe bet that most of us will head straight for the turbo-flangers or pitch-shifting delays that make your guitar sound like a alien invasion on helium. Initially at least, drama and aural pyrotechnics are the attention grabbers. For the real workhorse pedals, however, the more modest-sounding effects usually end up coming to the fore. After all, aren't we really just searching for the missing element that turns a good tone into a great one when we hit the switch? For many late-1960s and '70s guitarists, that element was often the treble booster; the effect plays a big part (along with a Vox AC30, of course) in Brian May's monster tone, and leant considerable weight to Ritchie Blackmore's Deep Purple Strat/Marshall sound.

BSM Effects is a German-based company who has turned the design and construction of these 'humble'

pedals into a bit of an art form. Just treble boosters though? Well not quite...

## CONSTRUCTION & FEATURES

Like many boutique and small-scale pedal manufacturers offering hand-made stompboxes, these BSM pedals use the kind of cast-aluminium casings that can be obtained from most electronics parts suppliers. While these make for a chassis that is tough and durable enough to survive almost anything a life on the road can chuck at it, there are disadvantages. The most obvious downside is that the whole base of the unit has to be removed each time the battery needs replacing. Keeping a screwdriver handy is a good idea, as there's no provision to use a power adaptor with any of these pedals. In fairness however, the current consumption is quite low from a single 9 Volt PP3 battery, seemingly comparable to the average medium-gain overdrive stompbox.

The bases of the units are cushioned by four stick-on rubber pads, which have a tendency to exaggerate the other practical problem that comes

with these boxes: the units are quite narrow, and by fixing these small 'feet' to the bases, the stability is lessened even further, to the point that it's possible to flip the pedals over if you're not that accurate with your stomping. It should be said, however, that BSM has helped matters by positioning the heavy-duty footswitch fairly central on the top of the units, which does make switching more positive. Of course, this in turn could cause problems with top-mounted controls, but this shortcoming has been addressed by moving any appropriate knobs to the sides of the unit. A side-effect of this re-positioning means that a careful foot can actually adjust the settings too – footwear permitting of course. This said, the only real niggle about the construction of all these units is the lack of an LED status indicator. It's not a hassle if you want an obvious and considerable boost for solos, but part of the appeal of these pedals is the subtle polish they can give your basic tone with lower settings. Given that the average sound check and consequent gig can be hectic and noisy to say the

## GBINFO

EXCLUSIVE BY  
**BSM**

### BSM PEDALS

PRICE: £122.50 - £182.50

BUILT IN: Germany

TYPE: Stompbox

EFFECTS: Various: Treble boost, Fuzz

FEATURES: Various: Volume control, tone control, fuzz control/switch

POWER: 9V PP3 battery

DIMENSIONS: 60(h) x 78(w) x 112(d) mm

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**TRANNY TALES**

IMPORTANT COMPONENTS

Just as transistors replaced valves in the world of electronics as a technically superior component, silicon replaced germanium as a more stable material with which to make transistors and diodes. And in a similar manner, guitarists found that they liked the way that the old devices sounded over the more efficient newcomers.

The parallel continues, as germanium transistors can vary greatly in performance along with their wider range of physical characteristics. These BSM pedals are not only made from the original transistors found in those classic vintage pedals, but they've been specially selected to give each unit the most desirable performance.

**GBOPINION**

**BSM RM VELVET**

**GOLD STARS**

- ★ Great valve amp hooster
- ★ Works well with guitar's volume control

**BLACK MARKS**

- No power adaptor facility

**IDEAL FOR...**

That extra 'edge'



**GBRATINGS**

**BSM RM VELVET**

BUILD QUALITY	★★★★
FEATURES	★★★★
SOUNDS	★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★
<b>GBVERDICT</b>	★★★★

least, you might decide subtlety isn't really worth the uncertainty.

Although it's easy to be unimpressed by the look of these pedals, the BSM boosters should be thought of as boutique items. They're handmade, with the emphasis on the tonal benefits of top-notch components and circuits tweaked from classic designs. If – apart from the attractively designed and printed top labels – the exterior of the units could have been produced by any competent hobbyist, the interior shows that an expert hand has been at work here. The wiring and soldering is all exemplary, with the main circuit encased in resin to protect it physically, and possibly to

**GBOPINION**

**BSM RM VX-T**

**GOLD STARS**

- ★ Natural sound
- ★ Great feel

**BLACK MARKS**

- The baseplate arrangement

**IDEAL FOR...**

Sprucing-up any good valve amp



Classic metal tone for your pleasure; minimum fuss, maximum roar

keep the details of its construction under wraps. What we do know about the circuits of these stompboxes though, is that they've been based around some specially sourced and selected OC44 and OC76 transistors. These germanium components are in fact from batches originally designed for the likes of industrial measuring instruments and military communication systems – apparently they're powerful stuff!



**GBRATINGS**

**BSM RM VX-T**

BUILD QUALITY	★★★★
FEATURES	★★★★
SOUNDS	★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★
<b>GBVERDICT</b>	★★★★



Each unit is numbered individually

**RM VELVET – SOUNDS**

Set the Velvet to approximately the same level as the bypassed tone, and it's immediately apparent that the frequency curve chosen has been carefully selected to give an effective apparent boost without piling on the gain. That's not to say that there aren't a few extra decibels on tap if you need it however, but the tonal character such that it gives an extra clarity and presence to humbucker-fitted guitars, as well as fattening-up single coil tones. Bring in that extra gain and the combination of level and slightly honky, upper-mid emphasis gives an exciting singing tone to a lightly overdriven valve amp.

BSM recommends the Velvet for use with single coil-fitted guitars, due to its ability to add bite without shrill treble. It's almost like a presence control in this respect, and excellent for sprucing-up the tone of a muddy-sounding amp.

**VX-T – SOUNDS**

As might be guessed from the name, the VX-T is based upon the Vox Treble & Bass booster, although if you're familiar with this vintage stompbox, you'll be pleased to hear that the



effectively mean a range from sizzling lead through to jangly clean tone.

### RM MAJESTIC – SOUNDS

Of all the RM pedals, the Majestic is perhaps the closest to the original Range Master units that were so popular with those pioneering rock guitarists. The Majestic uses the same OC44 transistors from a very hard to find stash, and using specially selected vintage transistors has obviously given the Majestic an edge that the rest of

the range hasn't been blessed with. It's not just hype either: these pedals were tested 'blind' initially, and the Majestic had a real 'ooh' factor that made it instantly stand out. This was

**"IT'S A SOUPED-UP TONE, THAT'S VERY NATURAL WITH THE PEDAL SET TO MAX"**

GB RATINGS	
<b>BSM RM MAJESTIC</b>	
BUILD QUALITY	4/5
FEATURES	4/5
SOUNDS	5/5
VALUE FOR MONEY	4/5
<b>GB VERDICT</b>	4/5

woolly bass sound of that unit has been much improved here. Unusually for a boost-based pedal, the VX-T trades its volume pot for the alternative advantages afforded by a tone control. This is no mere treble bleed set-up such as found on a guitar; it's more akin to a parametric equalizer, which comes across something similar to a mild sweep in use. Considering that many guitarists have employed a fixed wah to achieve a punchy lead tone over the years, this pedal provides a potentially very useful sound. Approximately half-way settings give a balanced tonal signature, and sound more effective when backing-off the guitar's volume control. With an overdriven valve amp, this can



GB RATINGS	
<b>BSM RM METAL</b>	
BUILD QUALITY	4/5
FEATURES	4/5
SOUNDS	5/5
VALUE FOR MONEY	4/5
<b>GB VERDICT</b>	4/5

noticeable as a much smoother push into valve amp overdrive, and a much richer overall depth. More than the other pedals here, it gives a kind of 'souped-up' amp tone, that's very natural with the pedal set to maximum. If you're getting your sounds from your guitar's controls, clean tones can sound a little harsh.

### RM METAL – SOUNDS

Metal it may be, but this isn't a total distortion sound source for the Slipknot and Mudvayne admirer; this is real old-school, early Sabbath stuff. As it's been based on the original 60s Range Master treble boost unit that Tony Iommi – among many others – used, this might not be surprising. This is more than just a treble boost, as there's more character and actual drive available this time. In fact, you can't actually get a clean tone from it if you're using generously endowed pickups.

It's a very dynamic fuzzy tone, that just gets more in-ya-face as the level increases. As a boost, it summons up a very thick and congested lead sound that's extremely appealing, or with a clean channel, a rhythm tone that's reminiscent of recent stoner bands (think Queens Of The Stone Age). ➔

GB OPINION	
<b>BSM RM MAJESTIC</b>	
<b>GOLD STARS</b>	★ Rich-sounding boost ★ Extra level without noise
<b>BLACK MARKS</b>	● No status indicator
<b>IDEAL FOR...</b>	Effective solo boosts

GB OPINION	
<b>BSM RM METAL</b>	
<b>GOLD STARS</b>	★ Distinctive tone ★ Good noise level
<b>BLACK MARKS</b>	● Fiddly battery access
<b>IDEAL FOR...</b>	Old-school metal or stoner rock tones

The Fuzzbender, as awesome as it sounds



**DETAILS**

CLASSIC TONES TO SPICE UP YOUR VALVE AMPS: BOUTIQUE QUALITY, BUT SENSIBLE VALUE TOO



Each unit has a simple layout: a single footswitch and volume knob do all the work



A home-made look perhaps, but rough and ready for stage use at the very least



The unique designs on top of each unit give each pedal its own identity



**GBOPINION**

**BSM RM FUZZBENDER**

**GOLD STARS**

- ★ Two great fuzzes
- ★ Very useable sounds

**BLACK MARKS**

- Battery's flat, where's my screwdriver?

**IDEAL FOR...**

Warm vintage-sounding fuzzy things



**RM FUZZBENDER – SOUNDS**

Farthest from the treble boost theme, the Fuzzbender is classic fuzz at its most appealing. What's most surprising is the vast range of

sounds that are available here, and also that most of them are so useable. The key is that innocuous-looking switch on the top of the unit, which gives access to separate circuits based on those 60s favourites, the Fuzz Face and Tonebender. This pedal also has a fuzz control as well as volume, which gives access to some milder variations on the theme of fuzz. It's especially appealing with the bassier and softer character of the Fuzz Face-alike setting – very 'Jimi' with a Strat. Turn up the wick and strap on a humbucker fitted guitar, and it's very easy to summon up some early-Santana-type thick and sustained tones.

The other setting is harder, with a tighter feel. This leans more toward the treble-based sound of the British 60s bands like the Spencer Davis Group, or even Jeff Beck's Yardbirds work.

**GBCONCLUSION**

HAND-MADE & FIT FOR A PRO

Treble boosters aren't glamorous effects, and in this day of high-gain amps with extremely effective EQs it's easy to question the validity of stompboxes such as these.

Take a vintage non-master volume amp or clean channel from the likes of a Marshall JCM, and the effect of any of these stompboxes tickling those valves further into overdrive is something very different indeed. The Fuzzbender and RM Metal do add a different character to any set-up, but even with this, they have the whole range's ability to become a natural-sounding part of the overall tone.

Organic-feeling, professional-sounding, and good value for a handmade product, the BSM Treble Booster range offers that extra spice to breathe new life into your classic tube amp. **GB**

**GBRATINGS**

**BSM RM FUZZBENDER**

BUILD QUALITY	●●●●●
FEATURES	●●●●●
SOUNDS	●●●●●
VALUE FOR MONEY	●●●●●
<b>GBVERDICT</b>	●●●●●