

# SOUNDCHECK

## MXR M182 El Grande Bass Fuzz Pedal

By Ed Friedland

Originally printed in *Guitar World*, Holiday 2008

In the realm of the unsubtle, there are few things that rival the sound of fuzz bass: jackhammers gnawing through concrete, copulating hippopotami, an Andy Dick punchline, perhaps, but none of them are quite as much fun (unless you happen to be a male hippo). Fuzz bass was created accidentally during a 1960 Nashville recording session for the Marty Robbins hit "Don't Worry 'Bout Me" when a faulty amplifier gave Grady Martin's six-string bass a gnarling, buzzing sound. In due course, bass fuzz pedals arrived on the market, allowing players everywhere to create that "velvet chainsaw" tone. Unfortunately, they also caused their share of problems, including noise, extreme compression, microphonic tone and unpredictable behavior.

Now MXR has set out to correct these issues with the M182 El Grande, a bass fuzz pedal that captures the vibe of vintage high-gain fuzz with the reliability and quieter operation that modern technology provides.

### FEATURES

The El Grande comes in MXR's standard single-space metal box, which makes for an easy fit on an overcrowded pedal board. The unit is powered by a single nine-volt battery or an AC adaptor. As battery access requires undoing four screws, an adaptor is the sensible choice for those who want to avoid surprises at a gig.

Volume, tone and fuzz controls function as you might expect, but the addition of a Deep switch adds some new dimension by letting the El Grande deliver up to 15dB of boost or cut at two preset frequencies: 87Hz and 113Hz. An internal trim pot lets you select the amount of boost or cut.

Effect pedals are supposed to change your sound when you use them, but many stomp boxes introduce the dreaded tone-suck in the off position. MXR gave the El Grande the gift of true bypass, so your tone remains pure until you awaken the beast.

### PERFORMANCE

Fuzz is the easiest way to transform your bass into an atom smasher, and the El Grande certainly goes there. The gain is muy caliente, so to achieve a balance between your clean sound and the effect, you should keep the volume control set low; even at 12 o'clock, the effect level is a considerable leap. The tone control sweeps from dark buzz to snaggletoothed tiger, but there are many useful tones to be had between the extremes. The fuzz knob controls the saturation. Its minimum setting gives up a stubby grind reminiscent of tube failure, but cranking it yields a thick broth of overtones. The Deep switch adds considerable balls. It's preset at the factory for 10dB of boost, but the ability to cut the deep frequency range has some benefits when combining multiple effects.

The El Grande is a brutal device, but it exhibits unique touch sensitivity. I found I could work the tone by varying finger pressure, almost like an envelope filter, and even in the most extreme settings the overtones blended harmoniously when I played power chords. The effect tends to obscure attack, but I found a way to fuzz out with impunity and still retain the straight edge of my bass: using a two-channel amp, I ran the fuzzed signal through the effect loop of one channel and blended it with the signal from the clean channel.

### THE BOTTOM LINE

If you're a fuzz lover, the El Grande will fulfill your desire for the gnarly drone of transistors melting, and it successfully avoids many of the issues of fuzz boxes past while adding some new tricks of its own.



#### MXR M182 El Grande bass fuzz pedal

**LIST PRICE: \$165.00**

**MANUFACTURER: Dunlop/MXR, jimdunlop.com**

**Pro** Classic bass fuzz tone; greater reliability; less noise; deep switch; true bypass

**Con** ultra high-gain stage requires caution