



Xotic RC Booster, AC Booster, and BB Preamp

By Philippe Herndon

There's no better way of building your buzz than to live up to your hype. Xotic's handmade trio of overdrive/boosters have been making the rounds with numerous session pros and touring acts, and amateur tone hounds have begun singing the pedals' praises on discussion pages and gear sites. The fact that their name recognition hasn't caught up (yet) to the bigger manufacturers shouldn't deter players from giving them a serious listen.

LOOKS When I unpacked these three pedals for review, my wife called them "really cute," and it's easy to see why. Xotic uses an aluminum enclosure that's smaller (4.39" x 2.38" x 1.96") than the standard Hammond/MXR or Boss box. All three pedals share a similar external layout, with gain, volume, bass, and treble controls clearly marked by black silkscreen. The Davies pointer knobs are another nice touch. The

controls may be too small to be easily adjusted by foot, but by hand they're easy to get a hold of, and they offer a perfect amount of resistance for fine-tuning.

Cuteness notwithstanding, these pedals are no shrinking violets. Xotic uses a heavy-duty 3PDT footswitch that serves two important purposes, allowing for true mechanical bypass that completely takes the effect out of the signal chain and ensuring reliable operation in real-world conditions. On the inside, an epoxy-like covering protects both the circuits from vibration and the makers from DIY copycats. All jacks felt very solid, and while the bottom plate must be unscrewed to change the battery, DC operation is available with common negative-tip power supplies.

SOUND Like members of a family, the Xotic pedals share some qualities but vary in personality. Players who love their regular tone but just wish they could get more of it will find the RC Booster tough to turn off. In front of a small tube amp on the verge of breakup, the RC managed to take it over the top without imposing the EQ constraints that an overdrive pedal would. It was also great as a lead boost, both

at the end of a signal chain and in an effects loop.

While the RC's tone is clear as spring water, the AC Booster and BB Preamp can go from cream to black coffee. With more gain on tap, the AC can get really dirty while still maintaining clarity and presence. Head to head against a modified TS-type pedal, the AC matched the drive while sounding more dynamic and less congested. The BB Preamp shares a gain range with the AC, but exchanges the upper midrange snap for a bit more compression and smoothness. Both pedals were excellent at driving other distortions and fuzzes into controlled feedback.

But what impressed me most about all three pedals was their voicing. Each pedal sounded almost perfect with bass and treble at their center detent, but slight adjustments to these active EQ controls went a long way toward compensating for amp and guitar selection. Whether I was using an SG, Tele, strat combo or high-wattage head, I could always tweak the controls to get a cool sound.

ARE THEY FOR YOU? Although more expensive than their mass-produced competition, the handmade Xotic effects sound terrific and are built for everyday use. Players seeking high-gain tones will want to run them in conjunction with other effects or amps that are already overdriven; for clean boost to medium-gain tones, Xotic's offerings are prime contenders on their own. My pedalboard was sad to see them go.



1st Guitar Award
MARK OF EXCELLENCE

FEATURES

True bypass switching with LED indicator

Runs on 9V battery or negative tip power supply (such as Boss PSA-120)

Active +/- 15-dB two-band EQ via bass and treble controls

Adjustable gain and volume controls

PRICE
\$210

CONTACT

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ON THE CD



All three pedals share the same control setup: Gain, Volume, Treble, and Bass.