



Supro Drive, Fuzz & Boost

Having revived its amp range, Supro turns its attention to a new line of stompboxes. **RICHARD PURVIS** takes them for a test drive...

LIKE THIS? TRY

Pigtronix FAT Drive £139 is another with an 18-volt option, plus a lethal 'more' switch.

Supro is a brand that used to have near-mythical status. You'd see the blue/silver amps in photos from the 60s and, if you were lucky, you'd meet someone who'd met someone who'd spotted one once in an American junkshop, hidden under a duvet of cobwebs. But then, a little over two years ago, Pigtronix owner Absara Audio decided this was a name worthy of reviving. We're glad it did.

The reborn Supro amps sound as meaty as they look, and we can't deny our tails had a bit of a wag when an

but unusually tall - almost three inches including the knobs. The knobs also match those used on the amps, with tiny white markers that aren't exactly super-easy to see; and, as if they weren't intriguing enough already, each unit has an expression pedal input. What for? We'll soon find out.

Drive

Just as the original Marshall Guv'nor was intended to give you the sound of a JCM800 in a pedal, this little blue cutiey claims to recreate the circuitry

can use it to override the gain knob, allowing you to ramp up the distortion discreetly, rather than discretely, mid-solo. Like all the Supro pedals, it comes with a nine-volt battery, but the DC socket also takes anything up to 18 volts - extending our headroom options even further.

In use

We begin with the gain at zero, and by crikey we're tempted to leave it there. Setting the transformer to bold, we get just a smidgen of dirt and a distinct thickening of the mids; flick it to rich and the result is a smoother crunch with the mids flattened out and more fizz in the top end. These are highly musical, highly usable sounds, and we didn't even realise we'd started yet.

Now push that gain knob towards noon and things get quite peppy, but it's still solid and controlled, with no obvious effect on playing dynamics at all. Is it like the overdrive you get from the output stage of a valve amp? Well, yes, and we have to say it's pretty Supro-like in its rich, throaty character.

Cranking the gain dollops on more entertainment, all the way up to full blast; by now, the difference made by the transformer tap is less obvious, but there's still more compression in rich

Things start happening about 10 o'clock, and the distortion is as smooth and furry as a bucket of chinchillas

expansion into the stompbox market was announced at the NAMM show back in January. There are three pedals, all with their origins in amp-like sounds - no stereo flangers or ring modulators here (at least not for now) - and the colours are in keeping with the look of the amplifiers.

Assembled in New York State using brushed aluminium enclosures with clever side-mounted battery compartments, they're compact pedals

of a Supro amp 'from end to end'. Well, the company seems to have forgotten the valves, but what you do get is a real output transformer. What's more, it's coil-tapped so you can switch between high-headroom 'bold' sounds and a more compressed 'rich' option. If you don't think that's an interesting idea, put down this magazine at once.

The volume, gain and tone controls are pretty self-explanatory; if you have a TRS-wired expression pedal, you

mode and more midrange bark in bold – perfect for old-fashioned lead work on a Les Paul’s bridge pickup. Just about everything this box does sounds great... and plugging in an 18-volt power supply does indeed bring a chunk of extra power to what is already a swinging party.

Oh, and we almost forgot the expression pedal input. With a suitable pedal plugged in, you can set the minimum gain level with a trimpot inside the Drive and the maximum with the control on the top – then dial the heavy overdrive in and out with a flick of the ankle. This might not be a feature that every owner ends up using on a regular basis, but it’s a lot easier than fiddling with your guitar’s volume knob mid-solo.

Fuzz

Supro’s reference points here are the Big Muff, Tone Bender and Fuzz Face: pretty much the holy trinity of vintage fuzz. It uses a combination of germanium and silicon transistors, and has a two-knob EQ section; this time, your expression pedal can be used to adjust the treble.

In use

We didn’t enjoy the sound of this one at low gain levels, but then of course low gain is not the reason you buy a fuzzbox, is it? Things start happening round about 10 o’clock on the dial, and when the distortion comes it’s as smooth and furry as a bucket of chinchillas. Don’t expect tonal transparency or aggressive bite here – your guitar’s midrange spikes are gone, replaced by the ‘boopy’ signature of a classic fuzz with whispery top and ample bottom.

Winding up the gain has the same effect as on the Drive pedal and, again, upping the voltage to 18 gives the sound more solidity – though in this case you might not be glad of it. This unit never quite hits the violin-like eternal sustain of a good Muff, but the EQ controls give it much more versatility than most vintage fuzzes. Try putting it after a clean boost in your effects chain to really sharpen up the treble response.

Boost

Speaking of clean boosts... finally we come to the one-knob wonder, a JFET-based device with a bright white LED and a simple promise to drive the front end of your amp

harder. Aside from the volume control (up to 20dB), there’s a three-way mini toggle switch that allows you to engage either of two filters: high pass and low pass, for a little bit of tone-shaping.

In use

We’re hoping for a transparent gain-hike, and that’s what we get. Actually, with volume at zero what

we get is silence – not much use on its own, but this allows the Boost to provide full-range volume swells when paired with an expression pedal. ‘Boosted’ volume matches the bypass signal at around 11 o’clock, and it does feel ever so slightly brighter (and hissier) than the untreated signal, though that’s hardly noticeable. From there on up, it’s pure gain all the way.

The passive tone filters feel counterintuitive at first – you’re adding gain then taking some of it away again – but both have been judged tastefully and certainly have their uses. Pushing an amp into overdrive can easily turn humbuckers bloomy, or single coils spiky, and this is a simple way to cut out either problem without sabotaging your fundamental tone. ⚡



KEY FEATURES

Supro Drive

- **PRICE** £169
- **DESCRIPTION** Overdrive pedal, made in USA
- **CONTROLS** Volume, gain, tone, bold/rich transformer toggle switch; true bypass footswitch; inputs for TRS expression pedal and 9-18v power supply
- **DIMENSIONS** 66mm(w)x66mm(d) x119mm(h)
- **CONTACT** John Hornby Skewes 01132 865381 www.jhs.co.uk www.suprousa.com

Guitar VERDICT

- + Musical, amp-like overdrive
- + Transformer tap switch adds an extra dimension
- + Nifty ‘gain swell’ feature (if you have an expression pedal)
- + Sounds even better with an 18v power supply
- White knob markers are a bit small

It won't flatter your playing, but this ingenious little overdrive sounds all kinds of lovely

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Supro Fuzz

- **PRICE** £159
- **DESCRIPTION** Fuzz pedal, made in USA
- **CONTROLS** Volume, gain, bass, treble; true bypass footswitch; inputs for TRS expression pedal and 9-18v power supply
- **DIMENSIONS** 66mm(w)x66mm(d) x119mm(h)

Guitar VERDICT

- + Delivers thick and creamy vintage filth
- + More tonally versatile than most fuzzes
- + Cleans up musically with your guitar’s volume control
- Those titchy knob markers may again prove frustrating in live use

Well thought out and great fun... though it's coming in near the top end of a fairly crowded market

8/10

KEY FEATURES

Supro Boost

- **PRICE** £159
- **DESCRIPTION** Boost pedal, made in USA
- **CONTROLS** Volume, bright/neutral/dark toggle switch; true bypass footswitch; inputs for TRS expression pedal and 9-18v power supply
- **DIMENSIONS** 66mm(w)x66mm(d) x119mm(h)

Guitar VERDICT

- + Provides up to 20dB of uncoloured boost
- + Shrewdly judged tone filters
- + Handy for volume effects with an expression pedal
- Quite pricey for a relatively straightforward device

It may not appear sexy, but this is a nicely designed unit that's excellent for getting the most out of an 'on the edge' amp

8/10