

NEMPHASIS

FX

Joel McIver stomps Nemphatically on three new bass effects from Italy

Madison & Fifth
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In the wake of Nespresso, the George Clooney-endorsed coffee brand, comes Nemphasis, another product with an N in front of a common word. What next, Nampeg and Nashdown? While we're wiping away tears of laughter at our own wit, check out these proudly all-analogue pedals: a bass overdrive, compressor and chorus among them. At just under £150 each, they're not your common-as-muck effects units, that's for sure, but then again that price tag does make them affordable to most bassists in gainful employment. All three are the same size and weight and share the same casing, LED, stomp switch, input/output and power options, making it tempting to lay all three identical boxes in a row on your pedalboard, for those of the OCD persuasion.

The Smoking Bass Overdrive is simple and dead easy to manage, with a Gain control doing all the work, Bass and Treble there to modulate the tone and a Volume pot for obvious reasons. What distinguishes the SBO from the 950 million other overdrives currently on the market is its gentle touch. The boffins at Nemphasis obviously understand that bass players' distortion needs differ radically from those of guitarists, for whom they also build several effects units. As a result, the drive tones available here range from super-subtle, via a soft crunch and a space-rock buzz. There's no caffeined-up, bug-eyed treble screech option, which you so often end up with when you borrow your guitarist's distortion. If that's the sound you need, look elsewhere.



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

PRICE | £149 each

MADE IN | Italy

CONTROLS | (Smoking Bass Overdrive) Gain, Bass, Treble, Volume; (VT Comp Bass Optical Compressor) Compress, Attack, Level; (Steam Bass Analog Chorus) Depth, Speed, FX Level, High Pass Filter low/high selector switch

POWER | 9V battery or external power supply (neither included)

DIMENSIONS | 71 x 120 x 55mm

WEIGHT | 250g (excl. battery)

WHAT WE THINK

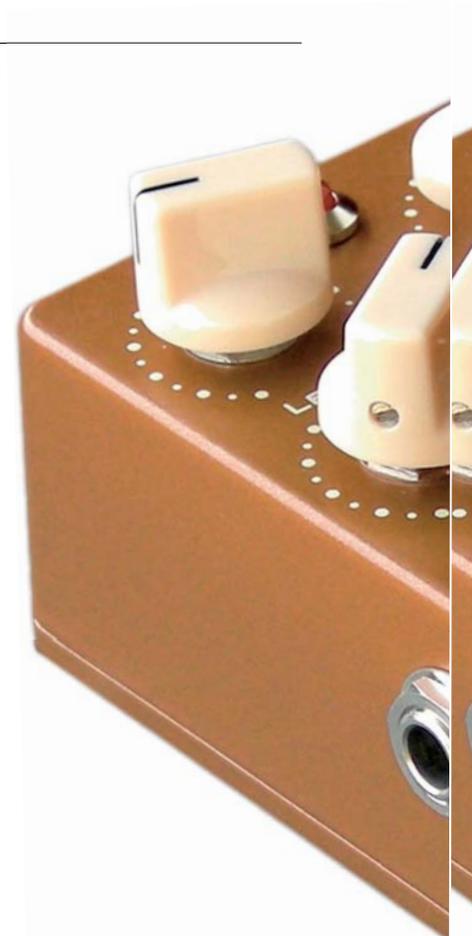
PLUS | Solid construction, surprisingly subtle effects range

MINUS | Battery access could be quicker

OVERALL | Designed for bass and true to analogue values. Bellissimo!

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■
SOUND QUALITY	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■
VALUE	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■



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We’ve played a few compression pedals here at *BGM*, and while they’re obviously best applied in a recording scenario or in a multi-FX signal chain, you can have plenty of fun with them in the familiar one bass, one pedal, one amp situation too. The VT Comp Bass Optical Compressor impressed us most with its range, offering the player anything from a mild compression and a concomitantly neater/cleaner/tidier/[insert your favourite comparative adjective] sound, all the way up to a fully squashed but still usable tone. The Compression control allows you to set the amount of tone-crushing that happens, and the Level pot is your blend of dry and processed tones, but the star of the show here is the Attack control, which permits you to ‘delay’ the onset of the compression and thus enables a very brief peak in a given note’s onset volume.

Finally, the Steam Bass Analog Chorus has a secret weapon which bass players – especially those who fear that a chorus effect will turn their bottom frequencies into gloom – will relish. The High Pass Filter switch allows you to determine whether the chorus effect is applied mostly to your high or low frequencies, a welcome touch that will give you tons more manoeuvrability.

The other controls – the obvious FX Level aside – need a little investigation before you find your preferred tone, not because they’re labelled any differently from other chorus pedals, but because they offer a seriously wide range of sounds. Depth is the serious control here, supplying super-deep frequency swings through to the mildest of tweaks. Conversely, Speed is like the drunk cousin at a wedding, allowing you the classic 80s slow cycle all the way up to the maximum-velocity, enraged-wasp-in-a-jar reverberation that will, if we’re honest, only ever be used to annoy people.

Just one negative point about these fine pedals, which is that removing the battery – should you prefer that power option – is a slightly irksome process, involving removing the entire bottom plate of each unit via four small screws. This won’t be an issue in the studio, depending on how much your fingers resemble Cumberland sausages, but at panic stations in the middle of a gig, in the pitch dark, with a strobe light on, 90 seconds before your amazing shred solo begins, you or your tech will have an 80 per cent chance of naffing it up. With so many similarly-priced and specced pedals around whose batteries flip out of a dedicated compartment with ease, this seemingly small point may be a deal-breaker for you. If not, do investigate Nemphysis with total confidence. ■

