

# Quicktest

## Positive Grid BIAS Desktop & BIAS Professional **\$99 & \$199**

Plug-in for amp creation

**CONTACT:** Positive Grid **PHONE:** N/A **WEB:** [www.positivegrid.com](http://www.positivegrid.com)



**We first** came across BIAS as an iPad app that took amp simulation on that platform to new levels of detail, offering the chance to get in and tweak amps at a deep level, change valves and the like.

Now, while iPads are great for many things, not everybody has one, so it's very welcome news that Positive Grid has released a computer-based version of BIAS in AU, VST, RTAS and AAX plug-in formats to use with your Mac or Windows DAW. BIAS Desktop is the basic version, but there's also a BIAS Professional, which sports additional features.

### In Use

There are no effects as such in BIAS, just pure amps covering plenty of well-known makes and models, generally sounding richly authentic and feeling good to play through. You get 36 amps to start with, grouped in sound categories such as Clean, Metal, and so on. Each amp's signal path is constructed from a string of components – a customisable panel, preamp, tonestack, power amp, transformer and a cabinet with a choice of two moveable mics.

In addition, you get a couple of eight-band EQs that can be inserted at various places in the

chain, plus a noise gate and room simulator. For editing, you can swap whole components: change a Fender tonestack for a Marshall one perhaps, or get into the adjustable parameters of a component, such as changing the valves or moving the plethora of knobs for some very subtle tonal shading. You can save any amps you make into the memory and assign eight favourites to a front-panel grid for instant recall with just one mouse click. Any amps you create can be shared online with other BIAS users via the built-in ToneCloud facility, and, likewise, you can download

amps that others have created. BIAS Professional takes things further by adding three Amp Design Expansion Packs (Glassy, Crunch and Insane), but its unique feature is Amp Matching Technology, where you can make any BIAS amp match the tone of a real-world amp/cabinet/microphone setup. First off, you need to choose a BIAS model that's closest to your target sound, take a quick sample of that target sound by either playing live through a mic'd amp or playing it back from a recorded track on your DAW, and let the software carry out the tonal compensation and enhancement needed to make the BIAS amp model accurately match it. This works really well, allowing you to effectively model your own amp but, more than that, you can also get access to exclusive models on ToneCloud that others have matched, with all the possibilities that that entails.

### Verdict

Virtual amp building on a computer isn't a new concept: Peavey's ReValver started and continues the trend, but BIAS takes it in another direction, especially with the opportunities that the amp matching facilities and ToneCloud opens up. If you are looking for a general amps and effects plug-in for your computer, the lack of effects could direct you elsewhere, but if you want open-ended, quality amp modelling to expand your tonal horizons you'll find it here. **[TC]**

**GUITARIST RATING** ★★★★★

**Guitarist says:** An amp sim plug-in that goes a step further



# Livid Instruments Guitar Wing £165

MIDI controller that attaches to your guitar

CONTACT: SCV Distribution PHONE: 03301 222500 WEB: [www.lividinstruments.com](http://www.lividinstruments.com)

**MIDI** can offer plenty of functional benefits for guitarists, such as changing presets and adjusting parameters on hardware digital effects and software amp sims. The Guitar Wing aims to give you that MIDI control, wirelessly, straight from under your fingertips. It's designed to slot over the lower horn of your guitar and, while it's not suitable for use on every type of guitar, has adjustments that will allow it to fit a wide range of popular instruments: Strats, Teles, Les Pauls and Fender basses included.

Working via a Bluetooth connection to a USB dongle that you plug into the device that you want to control, the Guitar

Wing can output MIDI note and Control Change information via an array of switches, buttons, pads, touch faders and a 3D motion sensor. Templates for the MIDI mapping are available for popular software platforms – you can remotely control Logic Pro X's recording functions from across the room, and switch effects and adjust parameters in real time in Guitar Rig, for example.

You also get the WingFX software, for standalone use or as a DAW plug-in, that offers a range of effects (delay, reverb, pitch change, and the like) that can be controlled directly from the Guitar Wing. Hardware such as an Axe-Fx or Eventide

stompboxes can also be controlled via a suitable USB-to-MIDI host.

## Verdict

It may look a little odd attached to your guitar, but if you have access to MIDI-controllable

effects, the Guitar Wing can add a whole new dimension to your performance. **[TC]**

**GUITARIST RATING** ★★★★★

**Guitarist says:** MIDI control direct from your picking hand



# Dickinson D1 Overdrive Pedal £399

British steel and old-school valve know-how equal stellar tone

CONTACT: Dickinson Amplification PHONE: 0208653 5285 WEB: [www.dickinsonamps.com](http://www.dickinsonamps.com)

**Jon Dickinson** is the man behind those wonderfully mad aluminium-cased amps used by Muse's Matt Bellamy and Squeeze founder Chris Difford, among others. Dickinson also makes an all-valve overdrive pedal called the D1, which combines similar audiophile-grade electronics with recognisable design and bomb-proof build quality. Originally, D1s were available only with point to point hand-wired circuits; however, increasing demand has prompted Dickinson to make them more efficiently, resulting in this production D1 version

## Sounds

The production D1 uses a printed circuit board and swaps rotary switches for standard pots, but is otherwise similar, with the same stainless steel casing, custom-milled aluminium knobs and two 12AX7s. There are controls for gain, tone, boost level and output, with a second footswitch for the D1's boost function.

In use, the D1 provides exceptional clarity and low-noise performance, combined with some wicked overdrive effects – there's a slight hint of fuzz at higher gain settings,

which is instant ZZ Top with a decent Les Paul plugged in.

## Verdict

It's far from cheap, but the D1 has a rare ability to transform a so-so amp into something quite special. Lower non-boosted settings add valve warmth and dynamics with a particular presence that makes a guitar part sit nicely in a mix, while the

overdrive sounds are a match for other top valve products. If you own a classic non-master valve amp, the D1 could be just the pedal partner you need to add class and versatility. **[NG]**

**GUITARIST RATING** ★★★★★

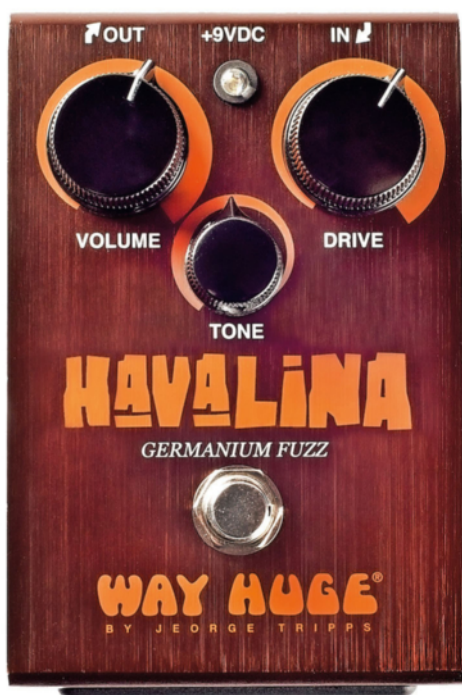
**Guitarist says:** An amp expander/booster of the highest order. Looks cool too, huh?







<http://bit.ly/guitarist390>



# Way Huge Swollen Pickle Jumbo Fuzz Dirty Donny Edition & Havalina Germanium Fuzz **£139 & £99**

Two sides of the fuzz coin from Way Huge

**CONTACT:** Westside Dist. **PHONE:** 0844 326 2000 **WEB:** [www.jimdunlop.com](http://www.jimdunlop.com)

**Original Way** Huge pedals (produced until 1999) are rare and sell for silly prices but, since designer George Tripps teamed up with Jim Dunlop to produce a new range, you can get new versions of many of those cheekily-named oldies.

One revived pedal is currently available not only as the Swollen Pickle Mark II (£99) but in a new more compact version, featuring limited-edition artwork by rock artist Dirty Donny. It's not just the size and look that's different, though: the clip control, available as an internal trimmer in the Mark II, now manifests itself as a mini knob on the front panel, along with similarly-sized crunch, scoop and filter knobs and normal-sized level and sustain knobs (the Mark II's internal 'voice' trimmer has been

dropped). Towards the other end of the fuzz spectrum is the Havalina Germanium Fuzz, a three-transistor germanium-powered fuzz box inspired by a vintage 1960s design. A three-knob unit, based on hand-selected Russian transistors and a passive tone circuit, it's essentially a pedal in the Tone Bender vein, but not a clone.

## Sounds

Described as a 'Jumbo Fuzz', the Swollen Pickle provides high-gain fuzz with a tremendous amount of bottom end and all the grunge sounds you could wish for. The filter knob sets the overall tone from woofy to razor-sharp, while the scoop knob does a number on the midrange and crunch tweaks compression. There's a massive range of possible tones courtesy

of those four fiddly mini knobs, which can dial in some radical stuff that may not always be musically useful. However, a bit of experimentation will soon have you dialling in intense distortions and aggressive fuzz with a shiny modern sheen.

The Havalina offers a range of overdriven tones at lower settings of the fuzz knob, but you can turn it up for nice thick fuzz. Not as syrupy smooth as some vintage Tone Benders, the Havalina stakes its sonic territory with a tone knob that covers a wide range and gets sizzly in the top end. It's possibly beyond 'tasteful', but good if you need it, and plenty to cut through a band mix. It cleans up wonderfully from your volume control, with a complete range of expression straight from your guitar.

## Verdict

Smartly finished in anodised aluminium, these robustly put-together pedals deserve a spot on hard-working pedalboards. If you think the extra £40 over the standard edition is worth paying, the Dirty Donny has a massive range of sounds, some in Big Muff territory, some more radical. The Havalina? You can pay a lot for a boutique Tone Bender clone, so to get something similar for less than £100 is sound indeed. **[TC]**

## GUITARIST RATING

Way Huge Swollen Pickle Jumbo Fuzz	
Dirty Donny Edition	★★★★☆
Way Huge Havalina Germanium Fuzz	★★★★☆

**Guitarist says:** Fuzz in two different flavours: both tasty!





<http://bit.ly/guitarist390>



Guitarist  
**CHOICE**

## MXR CSP204 Custom Comp Deluxe £134

A CSP with an extra tonal control USP

CONTACT: Westside Distribution PHONE: 0141 248 4812 WEB: [www.jimmdunlop.com](http://www.jimmdunlop.com)

The Custom Shop line has taken MXR into the upper echelons of the pedal market and it shows no sign of stopping with this Custom Comp Deluxe – it promises to be MXR's best compressor yet, thanks to the addition of the CA3080 IC, as found in vintage Ross comps, plus RF suppression components to reduce noise and interference.

Alongside sensitivity, attack and output controls, the CCD also boasts a low knob, which allows you to cut the compressed signal's low-end. Elsewhere, it's business as usual, with nine-volt battery and power supply operation, plus true-bypass switching, all in the robust MXR enclosure.

### Sounds

From the off, the CCD offers an uncoloured, lightly squeezed take on your tone – not as squashed as a Dyna Comp, but not as hi-fi as, say, the Empress Compressor. Always-on compressor users will

appreciate the low noise floor, too – hiss becomes apparent only once you're into heavily compressed territory.

The low cut control is the real sell here, though: it removes some of the woolliness of highly compressed tones, for record-ready sounds that sit well in a mix. It's great for funk players, but also humbucker users; stick your pickup selector in the middle position and cut the lows, and you have a passable single-coil impression.

### Verdict

MXR has a long line in compressors, but we reckon the Custom Comp Deluxe is its best yet. It's easy to get a great tone, and with the low control, it functions as a master tonal shaper, too – brilliant! [MB]

**GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★**

**Guitarist says:** A warm, vintage-voiced compressor that does subtle to squash, all with utmost tonal clarity



Guitarist  
**CHOICE**

## Apogee JAM 96K £105

Get a quality guitar signal into your iPad

CONTACT: Sonic Distribution PHONE: 0845 500 2500 WEB: [www.apogeedigital.com](http://www.apogeedigital.com)

**Plugging your** guitar into an iPad, iPhone or computer requires an audio interface, but converting that precious guitar signal to digital depends on the quality of that interface and, in particular, its A/D conversion. Apogee is the go-to name in that field for professional audio, and following 2011's JAM has introduced a new model – the JAM 96k. This takes things to a new level by offering up to 24bit/96kHz operation and a Class-A JFET input stage, designed to emulate the warmth and character of a valve amp circuit.

At one end of JAM there's a guitar input and at the other there's a socket for the cable that connects to your device; JAM ships with three cables – Lightning, 30-pin and USB. Power is derived from your device or computer, a single multi-coloured LED lighting up blue to show you that

everything is working. A knurled wheel on the side lets you set the gain for your guitar, with the LED glowing green, amber and red to guide the way.

### In Use

Plugging into an iPad and using JAM with Garageband, BIAS, AmpliTube and others, as well as into a Mac running Logic, we were treated to a natural-sounding signal with lots of dynamic range that brought the best out of the apps.

### Verdict

A robust, portable plug-and-play connection that accurately translates your guitar tone and dynamics and provides quality sound all the way. [TC]

**GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★**

**Guitarist says:** The perfect connection between guitar and iOS/Macs



## Fishman Platinum Pro EQ £289

A multi-function outboard acoustic preamp to solve your electro woes

CONTACT: JHS PHONE: 01132 865381 WEB: [www.fishman.com](http://www.fishman.com)

**There's little** doubt that the ongoing trend for electros is to have as few as possible onboard controls: for many, the side-mounted preamp panel is an antique. Yet us stage-aiming acoustic players still need some help, and the outboard preamp is becoming more essential. Fishman is no stranger to acoustic amplification, and the Platinum Pro EQ is one of three outboard preamps it introduced in 2014.

It certainly crams a lot into its 153mm by 142mm footprint. The single jack input, with its side-mounted input trim control, allows you to set your best level, and to the right of the volume control there's an LED input monitor. The volume control affects the overall output from the standard jack

out, plus we have an XLR DI out – with a pre or post switch.

In terms of EQ it's carefully considered with treble, bass and sweepable midrange augmented by low cut and brilliance controls. A guitar/bass switch alters the frequency centres to suit either – unlike the similar LR Baggs Venue DI, which is very guitar-specific, this preamp is designed for any acoustic instrument, from bass to violin, uke to mandolin. Along with this, we have a single-knob analogue compressor (with LED active indicator), as well as a tuner that offers a chromatic and four instrument modes and is engaged by the left-hand footswitch. The right-hand footswitch engages a level boost, which can be preset via

another side-mounted control from 3 to 12dB. We then have both a phase switch and viable notch filter to tackle feedback issues, oh, and an effects loop should you want the Platinum Pro to be the 'brain' of a larger set-up. Power comes from a 9V mains adaptor or a block battery – neither of which are supplied.

### In Use

Engaging the tuner mutes the output, so it's not only ideal for its main purpose, but also when you're plugging in/unplugging. It's not the brightest LCD screen we've seen and the red flat/sharp arrows are at the bottom of the display, so you really need to be on top of it to tune accurately. Bass, mid, treble and brilliance all have central 'flat' notch positions and

work very well, offering musical EQ, and unless set stupidly it's hard to get a bad sound. That brilliance control really helps reduce finger noise from nylon strings or that often ear-wearing hi-fi edge of so many modern pickup systems. Equally handy is the low cut – a high-pass filter that is really useful with bigger PAs and passive pickups.

Along with this efficient EQ, the compression certainly helps fingerstyle, while the level boost is very handy for solos or quieter passages if you're playing in any kind of band setting.

### Verdict

If you're serious about your live sound, this is an exceptional preamp that allows you to dial in your sound, compress and boost it, and sort your feedback. LR Baggs' Venue DI finally has a competitor. **[DB]**

**GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★**

**Guitarist says:** Superbly considered preamp plus for the gigging acoustic player