



# ERNIE BALL EXPRESSION OVERDRIVE & AMBIENT DELAY

£249 EACH

Ernie Ball subverts the standard stompbox format with treadle-driven overdrive and ambience pedals for total foot-control

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Neil Godwin

**M**ost of us know Ernie Ball for its strings, while some of us will know that it is the parent company of Music Man guitars. And others will be aware of its volume pedals, whose rugged design, smooth taper and transparent sound has graced many a guitarist's rig over the years. One of those volume pedals, the MVP (Most Valuable Pedal), went beyond mere volume adjustment and added a facility whereby it could add an extra 20dB of gain to boost your signal. Now, the company has gone even further and released two actual effects pedals based around a similar chassis.

The Expression Overdrive and the Ambient Delay are quite a departure from standard stompboxes because there is no footswitching involved here at all. These are always on in the signal chain and you bring in the effect by pressing down on the pedal treadle. At heel-down there's zero effect, but at toe-down you get the maximum effect. The obvious advantage of this is that you have total foot control over just how much

effect you bring in: overdrive with one pedal and a combination of delay and reverb with the other.

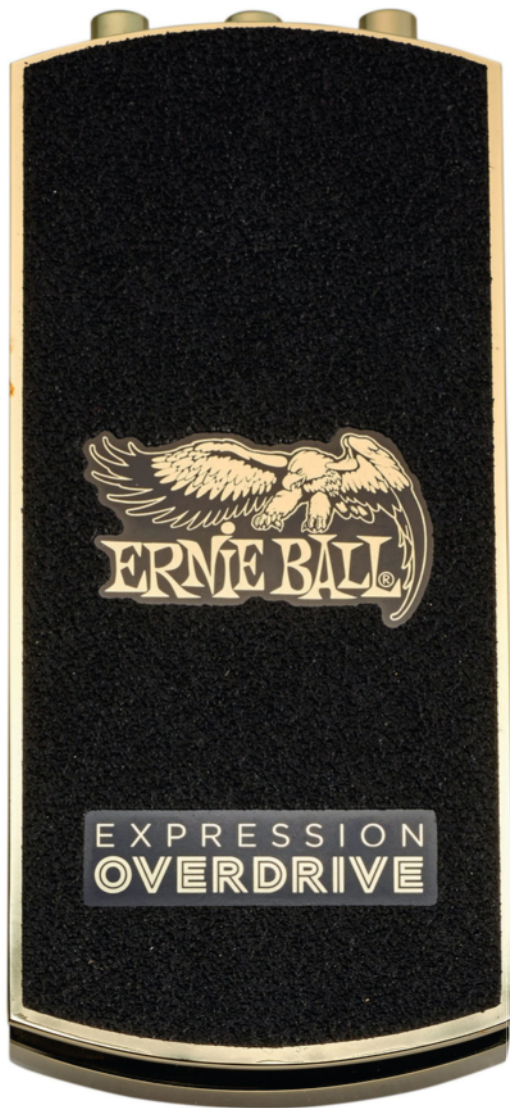
If you're partial to a bit of bling, these pedals will appeal with their respective gold and copper mirrored metallic finishes. Construction is rock-solid with an aircraft aluminium chassis that is sealed to protect the internal components and a practical non-slip grip mat on top of the treadle. Treadle resistance isn't adjustable, but seems to offer just the right amount of resistance while maintaining position wherever you 'park' it.

## Sounds

The Expression Overdrive has knobs for Drive, Tone and Boost, and by keeping the Drive knob at minimum but turning the Boost up, you can use it as a useful boost, perhaps with tonal shift, to drive your amp a little further. Its core function, though, is to deliver increasing amounts of overdrive via foot control. The basic effect is medium gain amp-like overdrive with about the same amount of drive at maximum as a Tube

**ABOVE** Ernie Ball brings on the bling with these gold and copper mirrored finishes

**RIGHT** This pair lets you play around more than the average pedal



Screamer, albeit with its own voice. Unlike some drive pedals that roll off a little bottom-end when kicked in, the sound here is always full-bodied – that’s because your full signal is always passing through the buffered pedal, which is not tonally transparent. In an A/B test, we felt that it had more emphasis in the lower mids than a signal that bypassed it completely, making it sound a little duller than we would have liked. However, depressing the treadle to add the overdrive brings the Tone knob into play and turning that clockwise should give you adequate top-end for your raunch. If you like the sound, using your foot to add degrees of dirt to a clean amp or fade a dirty amp further into and out of the zone for added emphasis could be a valuable resource.

The Ambient Delay has a knob for the amount of plate-style reverb and for the delay time (from 50ms to one second) and feedback (amount of repeats), plus the opportunity to plug in a footswitch for tap tempo. The reverb is basically there to add ambience to complement the delay: you can’t use it by itself because the delay will always be on (although you could keep feedback at a minimum with a very low delay time for a more ‘reverb-y’ sound anyway). The pedal has a more transparent ‘bypassed’ sound than the overdrive with none of the extra woof in the low-end, and what the treadle does is to fade in your ambience by degrees up to the point where your first repeat is as loud as your

dry sound. It’s good for ‘playing’ the delay, perhaps bringing it in on the end of a phrase to hang in the air or fading it in and out for emphasis. One trick you can’t pull with the treadle, however, is taking the repeats into self-oscillation, because the digital delay here doesn’t do that sound. However, while certain other pedals that allow expression pedal input can offer more versatility, the compact self-contained nature of this may be a more important point for some players.

### Verdict

There’s a lot to admire about the bold design of these pedals, alongside the fact that they offer something quite different from the norm of a simple on/off status; these are pedals with which you can express yourself and exploit the nuances of sound. Their always-on status won’t be attractive to every player, and – even at their street price of £210 – these pedals are not cheap, but some will feel that it’s a fair price to pay for a new hands-free layer of performance. **G**

**PROS** The treadle control of effects adds opportunities for playing expression; solid build quality

**CONS** The ‘always-on’ buffered status might not suit fans of true bypass pedals

### Tech Spec

**PRICE:** £249 each

**ORIGIN:** China

**TYPE:** Overdrive pedal and delay/ambience pedals

**FEATURES:** Buffered bypass, treadle-operated sound manipulation

**CONTROLS:** Drive, Tone, Boost (Expression Overdrive). Reverb, Feedback, Time (Ambient Delay)

**CONNECTIONS:** Standard input, standard output.

Ambient Delay also has a Tap Tempo jack

**POWER:** 9V adaptor (supplied)

**DIMENSIONS:** 90 (w) x 200 (d) x 60mm (h)

**Strings and Things**

**01273 440442**

**www.ernieball.com**

**7/10**

**ERNIE BALL  
EXPRESSION  
OVERDRIVE**

**8/10**

**ERNIE BALL  
AMBIENT DELAY**