MANUFACTURER	PRICE
JACKSON AUDIO	£349 & £49

MODEL	CONTACT
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JACKSON AUDIO

Asabi & Large Mouse

Distortion and drive with a RAT-inspired replacement distortion module

Words Trevor Curwen   **Photography** Phil Barker

Jackson Audio has introduced the Asabi, a signature pedal for LA-based Brazilian guitarist Mateus Asato, and it has some really interesting features. Basically, it pairs separate overdrive and distortion circuits in one chassis but the distortion circuit is interchangeable: you can simply remove the circuit board and replace it with another, something Jackson believes makes the pedal futureproof. The overdrive in the pedal is also flexible, featuring four different presets of clipping diodes that can actually be selected by some nifty footswitching, and you can also use the footswitches for on-the-fly adjustments of the distortion gain.

SOUNDS

The pedal's six larger knobs are dedicated to its high-gain, hard-clipping Modern High Gain distortion circuit. Bass, Middle and Treble knobs offer EQ tweaks like an amp's front panel, but it's the Presence knob that has the most influence over the distortion's tonal profile, focusing its cutting edge. The pedal is pretty much in the Marshall-in-a-box vein with the included circuit board, offering up the sort of throaty Brit crunch through to saturated lead tone that you might expect from a JCM800 – all given a healthy push if you use the Drive side of the pedal with it.

That Drive side is designed for transparent flat response and has standard Volume and Drive knobs plus a brightness-adjusting Tone knob. Drive character is determined by your choice of clipping diodes that are selected by holding down the Distortion footswitch for more than a second and then tapping it to scroll through them. Each is indicated by a different Drive LED colour and you can audition the changes in sound and feel as long as the Drive is engaged.

The choices are two LEDs, complementing the Marshall flavour, two symmetrical silicon diodes for a Tube Screamer-style drive with compression, three asymmetric diodes for a little more aggression, and four symmetric silicon diodes delivering a more transparent drive. Cleverly, Jackson has included level-matching circuitry so your volume level will remain constant when stepping through the four options, not just making comparison easier but also eliminating any nasty surprises should you wish to use the function on stage.

The idea of interchangeable circuit boards in a dirt pedal is not a new one (the

01. SMALL VOL/TONE/DRIVE KNOBS
This is the control array for the Drive side of the pedal

02. LARGE MOUSE CIRCUIT BOARD
The first in a series of plug-in circuits to completely refresh the distortion side of the pedal

03. REPLACING THE CIRCUIT
The interchangeable circuit board is easy to reach and pull out, just locate the pins in the sockets to fit its replacement

04. DISTORTION LED
Four footswitchable levels of gain are indicated by the brightness of this orange LED. It also displays different colours when selecting drive clipping options

05. DISTORTION FOOTSWITCH
Hold this down for more than a second and then tap it to scroll through the four drive clipping options; LED lights up amber, green, blue and magenta

06. FOOTSWITCHES
Presses on both footswitches simultaneously will scroll forwards through the gain levels in the Gain Cycle

Foxrox ZIM and its array of ZIMcards has been around for years), but Jackson has claimed that the Asabi is the world's first pedal to feature "analog distortion plug-ins". These are completely analogue circuit boards that contain all the op-amps, transistors, diodes, resistors and capacitors that make up a distortion circuit, and the first one available for the Asabi is the Large Mouse, based on a certain pedal that thankfully isn't made by Roland. Installing it requires loosening the three screws that hold the two parts of the chassis together, pulling out the installed board and pressing in the new one – it's a pretty simple two-minute job.

A/B'd side by side with our original 1980s ProCo RAT, the Asabi/Large Mouse was very much in the same ballpark but couldn't quite capture the full-on thick distortion of a maxed-out RAT without a little help. At full gain it pretty much nailed the sound of the RAT set at about two-thirds distortion, but required the Drive side to be kicked in as well to get to maximum RAT distortion. With the various drive options, though, and an EQ knob array offering more potential tonal tweaking than the original's single Filter, the pedal can offer a wider range of variations of the basic flavour.

Should you want to change the gain levels on stage there's a unique Gain Cycle function where you set the Gain knob at the maximum level you want and the pedal divides that into four recallable settings (25, 50, 75 and 100 per cent indicated by the brightness of the Dist LED). You simply scroll through these with a press on both footswitches at once. It's useful if you want to kick in more gain at different stages in a song, but it only scrolls in one direction so you may have to be careful not to go from maximum gain to 25 per cent by mistake. MIDI control is available over many aspects of the pedal including the clipping presets and Gain Cycle options.

VERDICT

Independent overdrive and distortion that combine brilliantly make this a very flexible pedal anyway, but interchangeable circuit boards will maintain that flexibility into the future. One to watch. G

PROS *Independently switchable distortion and overdrive in one compact pedal; four overdrive options; futureproof modular design*
CONS *Slight switching lag*