

GEAR DIGITECH EX-7 EXPRESSION FACTORY



The EX-7 is a tough little bastard, featuring a cast-metal chassis and a non-skid rubber base

£229

DIGITECH EX-7 EXPRESSION FACTORY

WANT SEVEN CLASSIC EXPRESSION EFFECTS IN ONE PEDAL? THEN STEP ON IT... WORDS: HENRY YATES

> THE SIZZLE

You can always spot the guitarist who has too many effects pedals. He's the one who gets through six packets of Duracell each week. You know... the guy who trips over his spaghetti junction of cables whenever he's on stage. And he never has his share for the petrol, because he's spunked all his money on a genuine 1960s Fuzz Face.

Such a guitarist wouldn't look twice at DigiTech's EX-7 Expression Factory. He'd probably think that the way this modelling unit squeezes seven of rock's most desirable pedal-controlled effects into one metal brick was ridiculously convenient. He'd probably scoff at its claims of authentic vintage tone, and sneer at its low price.

He'd be talking out of his arse. With most modern guitarists having neither the money nor the patience to assemble a pedalboard of standalone effects, the value and convenience offered by 'all-in-one' modelling has never looked more attractive. And with DigiTech growing more ambitious with each new pedal, *Total Guitar* was expecting nothing less than fireworks from this latest offering.

WHAT'S IT GOT?

There are already plenty of modelling units that replicate vintage pedals. The

WHO'S IT FOR?

Anyone who wants a world-beating pedalboard – without the hassle and expense

INFORMATION

ORIGIN: US
TYPE: Expression modelling pedal
EFFECT MODELS: Dunlop Cry Baby, Vox Clyde McCoy, DigiTech XP300 Space Station Synth Swell, DigiTech Whammy, Unicord Uni-Vibe, Leslie 147 Rotary Speaker, A/DA Flanger
DISTORTION MODELS: DOD Overdrive/preamp 250, ProCo Rat, DigiTech Metal Master, Boss Metal Zone, EH Big Muff Pi, Ibanez TS-9, Boss DS-1
ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Expression pedal, Flexible Output Mode, CIT Cabinet Imaging Technology, power supply (included), FS3X footswitch (optional)
POWER CONSUMPTION: 4.5watts
DIMENSIONS (HxWxL): 2.47 x 3.84 x 10.14 (inches)
WEIGHT: 3.38lbs
CONTACT: Sound Technology 01462 480000
WEB: www.digitech.com

point is, many of them recreate the kind of stompboxes that you switch on and off with a tap of the foot (like distortion), or else provide a lame autowah that gives you no control. By contrast, the EX-7 specialises in effects that are 'shaped' in real-time by the guitarist. This isn't just about nailing the tone of the originals. It's also about capturing the feel.

DigiTech know exactly which pedals will get us excited, and they've packed them all into the EX-7. First up is a model based on the Jim Dunlop Cry Baby wah (undoubtedly the most popular 'wacka-chacka' of all time). Then there's the Vox Clyde McCoy wah. Keep twisting the 'Model' dial and you'll find DigiTech's XP300 Space Station Synth Swell (a bonkers 'orchestra' pedal that you'll never find in the classifieds, even if you could afford it) and Whammy pedal (the choice of everyone from Tom Morello to Metallica). Finally, we give you the Unicord Uni-Vibe (the daddy of chorus pedals), the Leslie 147 Rotary Speaker (modelled on Leslie rotating speakers from the 1960s) and the A/DA Flanger. Check out the Magnificent Seven box on p.138 for more details.

Given the EX-7's modest price tag and lack of buttons, you might be forgiven for thinking that's your lot. Don't bank on it. Alongside the seven effects models, the EX-7 also offers recreations of seven legendary

distortion stompboxes, each linked to a cabinet simulation. They're organised into sets, with the Cry Baby twinned to a DOD Overdrive/preamp 250 (and a 4x12 Marshall cabinet), the Clyde McCoy to a ProCo Rat (and a 2x12 Fender Bassman), the XP300 to the DigiTech Metal Master (along with a VHT 4x12), the Whammy to a Boss Metal Zone (and a Johnson 4x12 cab), the Uni-Vibe to an Electro-Harmonix Big Muff (again, the 4x12 Marshall), the Leslie to an Ibanez TS-9 and the A/DA Flanger to a Boss DS-1 (and Johnson 4x12).

The knob count is misleading too. It might look like the EX-7 has a meagre three controls (plus the aforementioned 'Model' dial), but each of these is actually divided into two sections – with the 'tip' of the knob controlling parameters for the effects models, and the 'ring' changing the properties of the distortion. Nor is the expression pedal all it seems. As you'd expect, rocking it back and forth controls effect parameters. What isn't so obvious is that there are additional toe and heel buttons (activated by stomping firmly at either end of the pedal) that offer instant access to effects in the heat of the moment.

That's the exciting stuff dealt with. Inevitably, the EX-7 also has a number of more 'adult' trimmings that TG didn't pay much attention to – like the Flexible Output



The EX-7 offers a choice of seven classic expression effects – from the Dunlop Cry Baby to the DigiTech Whammy



Unlike other expression pedals, such as wah or volume, the EX-7 has toe and heel (pictured) switches for selecting effects in a split second

The expression pedal controls effect parameters – but also features ‘toe’ and ‘heel’ buttons for easy access to effects



WHAT'S THE DAMAGE?
THINK THE EX-7 IS EXPENSIVE? TRY DOING IT THE OLD-FASHIONED WAY...

It's not until you sit down with a calculator and a copy of *Trade It* that you realise just how economical the EX-7 is. Even skimming over the fact that half the pedals modelled by this unit (such as the XP300, the Leslie and the A/DA Flanger) are no longer in production – and therefore priceless – the amount of cash you'd need to get the remainder onto a pedalboard is staggering.

Let's start with the Dunlop Cry Baby, a reissued version of which will sting you for £110. Not too bad, but then it's over to the Vox showroom to cough up £149 for the reissued Clyde McCoy. Next up are the DigiTech Whammy (MkIV) and Metal Master – yours for £209 and £89 respectively. By this point, you may be feeling the pinch, but you'll still need another £59 for the DOD 250 Overdrive Reissue and £70 for the ProCo Rat. Boss pedals are good value, but you'll still need to spend £39 on the DS-1 and £69 for the Metal Zone. Getting the Big Muff in your gigbag will take a not-inconsiderable £48, while the Ibanez TS-9 costs £99. Finally, you'll need to head to the Jim Dunlop website to pick up a Univibe UV1 for £299.

To get all these effects – plus the cab sims and the pedals that no longer exist – in the compact form of the DigiTech EX-7, you'll pay a mere £229. To assemble them on a pedalboard – in reissue form, and minus all the best ones – you'll pay over a grand.

Mode (it tailors the output depending on whether you're using an amp or a mixer) and the footswitch jack (it lets you connect up the optional FS3X, which is probably quite exciting, but sadly, DigiTech didn't put one in our box).

BUILT TO LAST?

DigiTech's artist roster takes in some of the hairiest (and heaviest) guitarists in the world of heavy metal. That's undoubtedly the reason why the Expression Factory is such a beefy little bastard. It's built from rugged cast-metal, weighs a chunky 3.38lbs and, thanks to its rubber base, it won't skim across your stage like a stone across the surface of a frozen lake.

HANDS ON

We're not knocking units like the POD, but there's a real immediacy about the EX-7's design that will suit anyone taking their faltering first steps into the world of modelling. DigiTech have struck a great balance here, with enough options to keep the dabblers happy, but not so many that it feels like a science lesson. The manual takes less time to read than a cereal box, and you should have the basics down in about 20 minutes.

Having connected one end of the EX-7 to our trusty Marshall and the other to our

ALTERNATIVELY

- Line 6 Pod XT Live – £399
- Korg AX10G – £115
- Vox Valvetronix ToneLab SE – £399

Telecaster, TG decided to set the ball rolling by running through the seven effects models and seeing what flicked our switch. The 'Model' control was duly turned to the '1' position and the pedal pushed fully forward to activate the toe button. Nothing. We tried again, this time pushing harder on the front of the pedal. Still nothing. It was only when we stood up and concentrated our entire bulk on it that the LED finally turned green, and the distinctive tone of the Cry Baby quacked forth from the amp. There's an important lesson to be learnt here – don't use this pedal when you're sitting down. We should explain here that pedals with a rocking footplate (or treadle, as it's known in the trade) often take a little more effort than regular stompboxes to switch on and off. This prevents you from switching the effect off accidentally when you're wiggling your foot excitedly during a solo.

There's no faulting the tones on offer here. Like the proverbial child in the sweetshop, TG was soon gorging ourselves on the various models and pinning down our favourites. Of the seven, we reckon the most useful is probably the Cry Baby. It's totally authentic, with a glorious funky swell that will lend real personality to the most prosaic of solos, and a massive Kirk Hammett-style punch when you rock back onto the heel button to bring in the DOD overdrive. →

THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN

TG INTRODUCES THE LEGENDARY PEDALS THAT INSPIRED THE DIGITECH EX-7

1 DUNLOP CRY BABY

Thanks to the wacka-chacking of Clapton and Hendrix, wah boomed in popularity at the end of the 1960s. The Cry Baby's ascent to the top of the pile was largely due to its Italian-made Fasel inductor, giving it a thicker tone and lush harmonics. Modern versions use optical sensors instead of the Fasel, but it's the original that's modelled here.



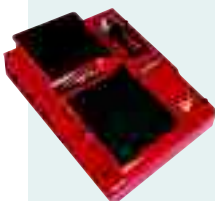
2 VOX CLYDE MCCOY

The world's first wah pedal was born in 1966, when Vox started tinkering with the mid-range boost circuit used in their amps. Originally intended to mimic the sound of a muted trumpet – hence the endorsement of brass hero McCoy – the pedal instead found its way into Clapton's gigbag.



3 DIGITECH XP300

It's been discontinued for years, but this gonzo DigiTech pedal deserved better. With effects including resonators, ring modulators, an autowahmy and reverse effects, the original XP300 was a true original. You can't even find them on eBay.



4 DIGITECH WHAMMY

It's only been around for a decade, but the Whammy feels like a modern classic. There have been four different versions since the release of the WH-1, but most of the pedal's most famous users (like Tom Morello and Munky of Korn) maintain the original is the best.

5 UNICORD UNI-VIBE

Created in the late 60s and promptly immortalised by Hendrix on the Star Spangled Banner, the Uni-Vibe was essentially a four-stage phase shifter with a vibrato option. Chorus would later become a dirty word, but here it was dark and sophisticated.



6 LESLIE 147 ROTARY SPEAKER

Looking not unlike a chest of drawers, this 1960s monster featured a speaker with a segmented drum spinning under it to disperse the sound. Organ players were the first to pick up on its unique tone, but guitarists soon got in on the act.



7 A/DA FLANGER

Introduced in 1977, the A/DA Flanger combined a 35-to-1 sweep range and built-in compressor to create its dramatic jet-engine roar.

A footswitch socket enables you to connect the optional FS3X for additional control



→ That's our favourite – now let's rank the remaining six. The Clyde McCoy wah would have to be our second choice. It's got a subtly different flavour to the Cry Baby – more biting and 'squelchy' – and combines with the ProCo Rat model to provide the ultimate setting for solos. We're also giving DigiTech's own Whammy a place on the podium. Between the massive array of pitch-shifting settings (anything from Octave Up to Reverse 2nd Down) and the unbeatable control of the expression pedal, this is your ticket to flawless divebombs and smooth harmonic shifts. Equally bonkers is the XP300 – our fourth favourite. Perhaps this model is best described as sounding like a troupe of Benedictine monks doing Gregorian chants in outer space. It's atmospheric and other-worldly; swelling and spiralling like an orchestra as you work the pedal, and turning nasty when you bring in the default Metal Master distortion model.

The final three sounds will appeal to the real vintage buffs. The Uni-Vibe wobbles along nicely, and although we don't see the

"If you're an effects junkie who changes his tone more often than he changes his socks, it should be fairly obvious that you'll love this pedal"

metal crowd using this setting much, classic rock fans will love it. The Leslie Speaker simulator is one for the mods. Pick out the intro to Paul Weller's *Changing Man* with the Leslie churning away and you'll never want to switch it off. And the A/DA Flanger? It's not to everyone's taste but it's great for old school Van Halen riffs. Just don't overdo it.

While TG loved the overall performance of the EX-7, it's worth mentioning a couple of minor gripes. For instance, it's possible to override the default settings and 'pair' any distortion model with any effect model, but not to have distortion on its own (ie, without also having a modulation effect). And while the toe and heel buttons work well, it also seemed strange that when you add distortion – then turn it back off – the EX-7 reverts to 'bypass' (ie, instead of returning to the modulation effect). But don't let us put you off with such trifles – this unit kicks serious ass.



THE BOTTOM LINE

All guitarists should have at least one decent expression pedal in their arsenal. This isn't just an indulgence. As everyone from Clapton to Hendrix would agree, the ability to control the ebb and flow of effects like wah brings a personality to your playing that wouldn't be there if you were just using your hands. The only question is whether the EX-7 Expression Factory is the one.

The answer is a resounding yes. If you're a no-nonsense rocker who uses a bit of wah and a lot of distortion, you might not think you need the versatility offered by the EX-7. But then, seeing as a standalone wah and distortion pedal would cost the same as this unit, doesn't it make more sense to go down this route and get the extra models too? And if you're an FX junkie who changes his tone more often than he changes his socks, it should be fairly obvious that you'll love this.

Versatility is one thing, but it's the quality of the tone that really did it for TG. Not only do all the models sound like they should, but they respond authentically too – bringing real dynamics and mood into the mix. Isn't it time you put your foot down?

FOR: Cracking level of authenticity and extensive options

AGAINST: You can't use the distortions on their own

TG RATING

