

# HEPTODE DEEP CRUNCH

BY JAMES ROTONDI

It doesn't seem like so long ago that "vintage tone" referred exclusively to gear from the '50s, '60s, and '70s. But in 2012, the measuring stick has shifted considerably, and nostalgia for the sounds of '80s and '90s gear has been making a steady comeback.

The recently released Ecstasy and Uberschall preamp pedals from Bogner, for instance, cop the drive channel sounds from those quintessentially '90s amps. French stompbox builder Heptode has jumped in the fray too, and the all-analog Deep Crunch and Heavy Tone stompboxes pay homage to the all-tube preamp channels of the legendary Soldano SLO-100 head—a fixture of the '80s and '90s tonescape if there ever was one. The Deep Crunch reviewed here, is, as you might guess, the tamer of the two Heptode offerings. It's suited to meaty rhythm work and riffs, and nails the response of the Soldano's crunch rhythm channel, but it's a dangerous weapon for bluesy leads and even singing overdrive.

## Deep and Purple

The purple Deep Crunch is handbuilt around two high-quality, two-sided PCB boards. It's housed in a rugged—if somewhat unexciting—steel enclosure, but the front panel is very logically laid out, with gain to the left, level to the right, and bass, middle and treble control knobs across the top. It's a control set that gives you a wider range of tone-tailoring options than most overdrive pedals—more like what you'd see on the front panel of an amplifier.

According to Heptode, the Deep Crunch can be used in a couple of different ways—as a preamp, connected to your amp via the power amp or FX return inputs, as a front-end overdrive pedal in a traditional guitar effects rig, or connected directly to a sound card or mixing board for recording to a computer or other device. For the latter method, you'd take advantage of the Deep Crunch's cool CabSim switch, which adds the EQ compensation you'll need when bypassing an amp and recording direct.



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That's a pretty wide range of options, which makes this much more versatile than a standard overdrive pedal—and at \$265 on the street, it ought to be.

## Munchy Crunchy Morsels

At gain levels below 1 o'clock, the Deep Crunch is a solid-sounding overdrive pedal—not necessarily spectacular or especially distinctive, but certainly effective. You could definitely consider it a viable

replacement for say, a Fulltone OCD, Xotic BB Preamp if you're worried about sacrificing OD quality to get the preamp and cabinet simulation capabilities of the Deep Crunch.

Things get much more interesting—and the sounds more distinctive—when you crank the gain levels a bit, goose the midrange slightly, and back off the treble a touch. Here I found lots of '80s-style Clapton tones to work with, and was

pleased by how smoothly the pedal cleaned up when I rolled my guitar's volume back. Plugged into a Deluxe Reverb, it was also easy to coax the medium crunch you need for tunes by the Stones, ZZ Top, AC/DC, Wilco, and Led Zeppelin.

At even higher gain stages, from 2 o'clock and up, the Deep Crunch is most at home. At full gain and full level, the Deep Crunch puts out up to 40 dB of gain. And with a slight midrange roll-off, and a treble boost, the sounds in this zone immediately evoke the kind of bright attack and heavy midrange associated with '80s metal icons like Ratt's Warren DeMartini. In fact, the very first lick that I was inspired to play when kicking the gain up to nearly full was DeMartini's clever signature riff on "Lay It Down," a drop-D monster that plays off a suspended fourth and a chromatic ninth chord move and sounds perfectly detailed and rich in these saturated high-gain settings.

When mated to a bit of eighth-note delay, the Deep Crunch springs to life in

## RATINGS

Heptode Deep Crunch, \$265 street, [europeanmusical.com](http://europeanmusical.com)

**Pros:** Warm, spongy distortions at high-gain levels. Pleasing meat-and-potatoes blues and Americana rhythm sounds at lower gain. CabSim switch for direct recording.

**Cons:** Not quite enough latitude to move into high-gain shred.

Tones 

Ease of Use 


Build 

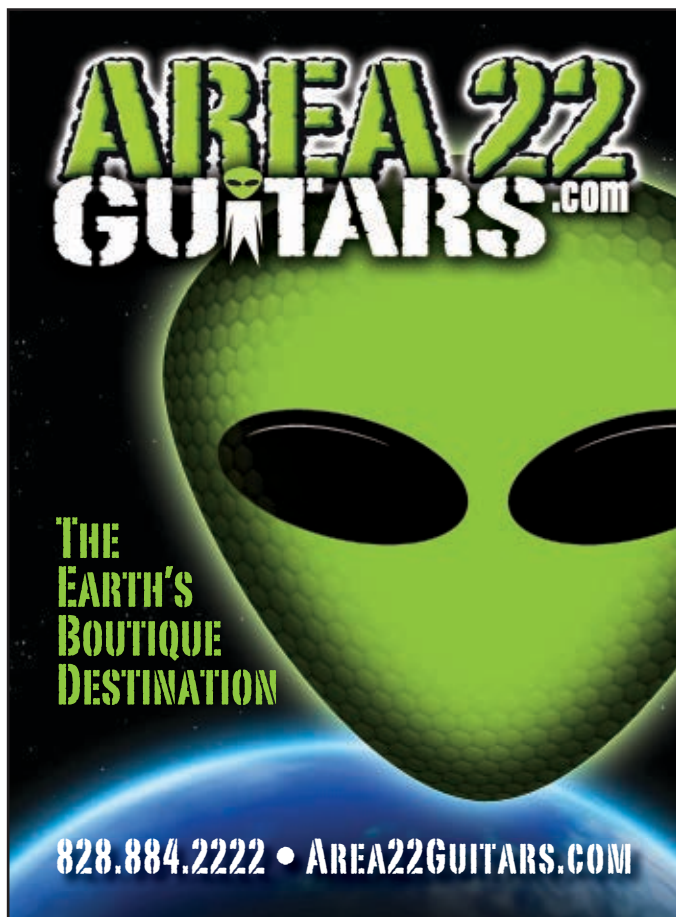
Value 

spectacular ways. Set up for the warm and spongy overdrive that defines brown sound, individual notes bloomed with a kind of timbral softness that doesn't feel like ice picks in your ear—even when the riffs are precise, tight, and syncopated.

### The Verdict

There's no shortage of fine overdrive pedals on the market, and the increasing trend toward pedals that bottle the sounds of legendary preamps are a growing part of that equation. The Heptode Deep Crunch must be considered a serious—if somewhat pricey—contender for anyone looking to

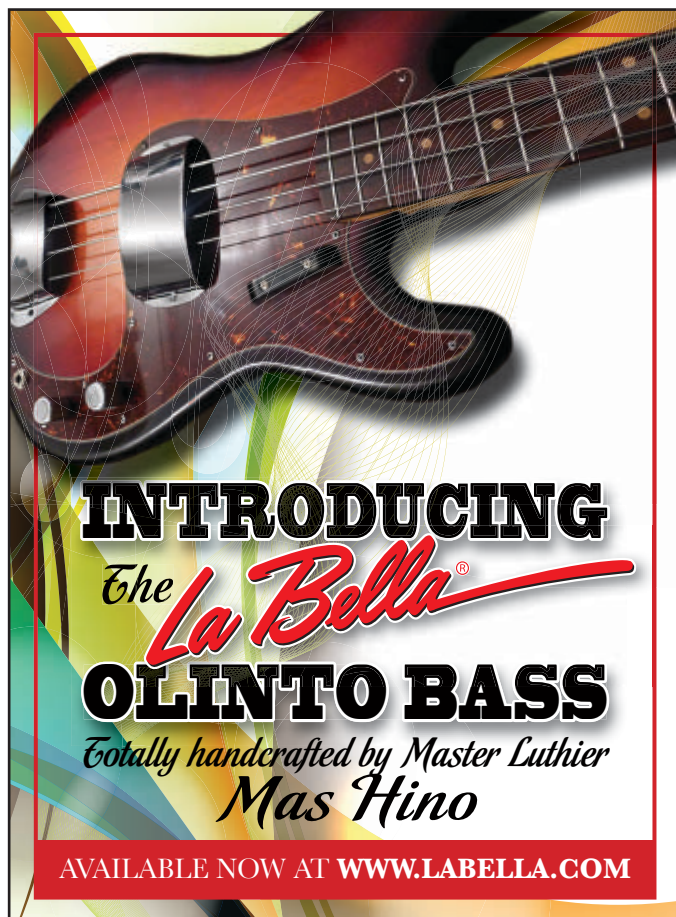
add classic preamp shimmer and drive to their favorite amp, or project studio players looking for an easy way to add Soldano-style dirt to otherwise too-polite digital mixes. It's a functional go-to box for those gigs where you need to make a clean amp sound like a cranked stack, or when you just need a bit of extra bark to make your amp's gain channel shout a little louder. The Deep Crunch captures the Soldano's brown-sound mojo and makes it easy to lug those tones to your next show—after all, when *was* the last time you tried to pick up a 4x12? This Heptode is a fine-sounding, and much lighter, solution. 



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