

FIRST PLAY



**MXR ROCKMAN
X100 ANALOG TONE
PROCESSOR**
£249

WHAT IS IT? 1980's 'hi-tech' headphone amp recreated in pedal form. What year is it?



Rocking On

MXR revives Tom Scholz's fabled 80s guitar headphone-amp tone in its latest pedal

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Phil Barker

1. Labelled Mode, this is a non-latching switch and presses on it scroll through the four modes, indicated by blue, yellow, amber and red LEDs
2. Set the input gain slider to best suit how your incoming guitar signal interacts with the four modes, and match the output volume to what's next in the signal chain. Note that there are no detente positions on the sliders
3. The output jack can be set to mono or stereo operation by an internal DIP switch. For stereo you'd need a Y cable with a TRS jack running to two mono jacks
4. The CTRL socket allows you to plug in a footswitch for control of the Mode switch (MXR recommends its TRS Split + Tap compact footswitch)

Long before the current plethora of 'rig-in-a-box' pedals there was the Rockman. Anyone who played guitar in the 1980s will be aware of it, and anyone who's listened to Def Leppard's *Hysteria* album will have heard it in action. In 1982, Tom Scholz of US rock band Boston designed and released the Rockman X100 headphone amp via his electronics company Scholz Research & Development, putting amp sound and effects for silent guitar practice into a portable unit that could also be connected to a recording console. The distinctive compressed sound, with its integral analogue chorus, soon found its way onto various recordings in the 1980s.

Now, over 40 years on, the range of Rockman units is apparently in demand, so MXR is catering to that with a new addition designed to revive the sonic character of the original headphone amp.

The new pedal features four different presets (CLN2, CLN1, Edge, Dist) as found on the original, and has switchable rich, shimmering chorus courtesy of a MN3007 bucket brigade chip. There's no sign of the original's switchable 'Echo', which was basically reverb, but that's not a problem as there are better options these days to partner the X100. The output (mono as shipped) can be switched internally to stereo, which gives you really spacious chorus.

An A/B test with our original unit proves that the new pedal has the vintage sounds down accurately. Overall sonics are very compressed with a bright top-end and some bottom-end roll-off. The two cleans each have a different EQ contour and offer sparkly clarity. The Edge sound offers crunchy raunch all day long and is sensitive to input gain settings for variation, while the Distortion is full on with loads of sustain – just right for those wailing leads. We liked the X100 best for DI recording, offering up flavours and textures that are entirely its own, but it could work plugged into an amp for radical tonal shifts.

Verdict

We welcome the fact that the X100 revives gear with a distinctive sound that has been out of circulation for some time, giving players another tool for the sonic shed. While it remains a rather niche option, it may be perfect for anyone seeking that specific 80s arena-rock vibe, and it's now available for all to discover. Maybe the time is right for the Rockman revival! **G**



MXR ROCKMAN X100 ANALOG TONE PROCESSOR

PRICE: £249

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Analogue tone processor pedal

FEATURES: Buffered bypass

CONTROLS: Volume, Input Gain, Mode switch, Chorus switch, internal mono/stereo switch, Bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output, CTRL input

POWER: 9V DC adaptor (supplied)

DIMENSIONS: 62 (w) x 110 (d) x 47mm (h)

Westside Distribution

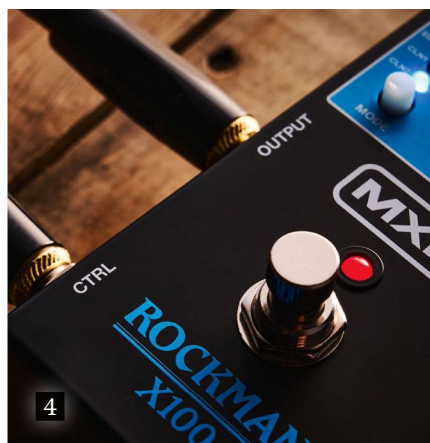
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PROS Welcome revival of a 'lost' sound; compact size; four distinct modes; stereo chorus

CONS We would have liked a dedicated headphone socket



THE RIVALS

This is a tricky one because there are no obvious current equivalents. We dare say you'd get close to the sound by combining compressor, EQ, chorus and distortion pedals, and, software-wise, there's a Rockman in Joe Satriani's gear collection for IK Multimedia's AmpliTube. Elsewhere in the Jim Dunlop roster you'll find the Rockman Guitar Ace (£118), a headphone amp in the spirit of the original that has three sounds (Clean, Semi Distortion and Heavy Distortion) but no chorus. Common on eBay and the like is the GOAT Analog Distortion Generator, a Japanese stompbox revival of the Rockman Distortion Generator half-rack unit.

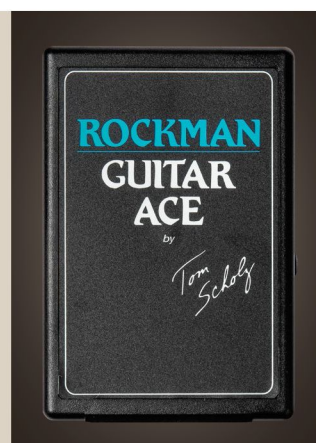


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