

MXR

EVH 5150 OVERDRIVE

REVIEW BY
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STREET PRICE
\$199.99



For anyone unfamiliar with the California Welfare and Institutions code, “5150” has a special meaning: involuntary psychiatric hold. Who needs it this time? Well, it’s not a person, but a pedal. It turns out that Mr. Eddie Van Halen—the king of “insane” two-handed tapping—has teamed up with MXR to put out a new pedal, the EVH 5150 Overdrive. This pedal is dangerously, crazily “out there,” and might very well need an involuntary psychiatric hold because of that. Indeed, the pedal possesses an unusually high-quality sound, with

richness and depth that one does not often hear. But if we’re going to call headquarters about a 5150, we’d better have good reasons.

Here’s reason number one: the vibrancy and richness of its sound. The 5150 will distort a note without mangling it. It’s as if individual notes can ring through, distinctly and solidly, without becoming buried in a mess of noise. Even in the higher gain settings, the 5150 acts with finesse, producing an overwhelming, massive, and deep form of distortion. It was a pleasure to simply strum

an open chord and let the thing ring out while listening for the changes in the tone as time passed.

Reason number two: the 5150 has a very good, three channel EQ. “Amplifier under the blanket,” “tiny amplifier,” “hollow overdrive,” and “telephone time” were some of the names that came to mind while comparing the tonal differences between various knob settings. This writer expected a large increase in loudness when the Bass knob was turned up, but it turned out that the signal simply “thickened.” In retrospect,

this behavior is a good sign, because it means that the 5150 eschews gimmicky expanded EQ parameters that other “insane” or “extreme” overdrive pedals might tout.

Reason number three: the 5150’s noise gate. Curiously, the 5150 features a noise gate, whose setting can be adjusted with the small, transparent knob on the lefthand side of the pedal’s face. Like any noise gate, the 5150’s will lower the level of the output in proportion to the strength of the incoming signal. If the incoming signal drops below a threshold, the noise gate will “close” (lower the output volume). Although the noise gate wasn’t an essential feature—lacking one wouldn’t have taken away from the pedal’s overall quality—it was actually a thoughtful feature to include. Overdrive will have a tendency to bring out all of an instrument’s possible noises. Sometimes it’s helpful to be able to

roll back the volume on a loud, overdriven passage. The 5150 can be set up to do that for the user in order to “confine” an insanely overdriven signal that simply wants to roam free, thereby drawing too much attention from other instruments or elements of a song.

Given all of these insanely good aspects of the pedal, I suggest that this pedal be involuntarily held. How can readers do this? It’s best to keep this thing safe on their own pedalboards. Sure, the 5150 will try to escape. Perhaps it’ll bargain with a buddy of yours, a guy who just wants to “mess around with it” on his own for a while. But exercise caution! The involuntary hold is for the 5150’s own good. No one would want the pedal to escape, once a person has heard the thing.

WHAT WE LIKE

Great tone, mainly because it’s deep and rich, but also surprisingly varied depending on gain settings.

CONCERNS

None.