

# MXR

## M108S TEN BAND EQ

STREET PRICE **\$129.00**

## M109S SIX BAND EQ

STREET PRICE **\$89.00**

REVIEW BY **IAN GARRETT**



In the pedal world where freaky fuzzes, outrageous overdrives, delicious delays, and marvelous modulation pedals, it is easy to overlook the venerable EQ pedal. Sure, it's a useful pedal to have, and can be used in a wide variety of applications, and can help improve your tone in many ways . . . wait, why don't I have one?

It's been a while since I've had a dedicated EQ pedal on my pedalboard. The last one was replaced by something else, who remembers what it was now. Maybe it was that boost pedal with separate bass and treble controls, or the compressor with a tone shift feature, plus it seemed silly to have a dedicated tone shaping pedal, when just about every overdrive and fuzz pedal I have offers some tone control. Let's not forget that each guitar I have also has tone controls. Why add yet another pedal that aims

to "fix" to my tone? Ironically, my last dedicated EQ pedal was the MXR 108 10 Band EQ. Fast-forward a half dozen years at least, and MXR is offering two updated versions: the M108S 10 Band EQ, and the M109S 6 Band EQ (the "S" signifies the sexy new silver color). With bright red LED lights for each slider, these pedals have the look to brighten up any pedalboard. More importantly, MXR has made some internal updates to both versions, making their operation quieter—a real plus when every pedal in your signal chain has an impact on both tone and noise.

In my testing of both EQ pedals, I found it interesting in how they differed from one another, both in tone and function—more on that in a minute. Firstly, I tried them in different locations on my pedalboard. I tried them first in the chain, where they act as sort of a

glorified master guitar tone control, affecting to some degree all other pedals that run after it.

The second place to put an EQ pedal is after any overdrives or fuzzes, and finally I tried them out in my amp's effects loop. As you might expect, I got different results in all three cases. Which worked best? It really depended on which pedal I was using.

Here's a quick rundown of the differences between the two pedals: Obviously, the M109S has four less bands, but that is not all. The M108S does indeed have 10 separate bands, which gives you more control over a wider audio spectrum, with deeper low end, and a brighter high end, plus more midrange control. It also includes two other useful features: a gain control—useful when you place it before an overdrive, giving it just a little more bite—and a master

volume control. The M108S also has a second output that is handy at the end of your audio chain, splitting the signal to two separate amps. An 18-volt adapter (included) powers the updated version and the M109S continues with the more common nine-volt adapter (not included).

Perhaps the most significant audio difference between these two EQ pedals is the decibel increments for each slider. The M108s has a  $\pm 12\text{db}$  range versus the M109S with a  $\pm 18\text{db}$  range. That might not sound like that big of a difference, but with a lack of a master volume control on the M109S it turned out to be a bigger factor than I was expecting.

For example, let's say you want to increase the amount of bass with the M109S at 100Hz—the lowest bass setting. Watch out; it doesn't take much to turn a bass shy signal into a real thumper. The old adage "less is more" is indeed the case here. Then, I added a little more top end to the signal. At 3.2k (the highest setting on the M109S), the treble can get shrill quickly if you goose it too much. The M108S has bands at 2k, 4k, 8k, and 16k, and with a cut or boost of 12db, you can really fine-tune your high end a lot more.

Of the two EQ pedals, I preferred the M108S for its added volume control, and the slightly less impact each slider had on the overall tone. With the M109S, I found I didn't move the controls too much past the neutral position, otherwise I found my tone was just too

unpredictable to be that useful. I really missed the master volume control too.

All of this leads back to pedal placement. The 109S worked best early in the signal chain, and not in the effects loop – it just made too much of a dramatic effect in this position, unless you plan to always leave it on, and then it might be fine once you dial it in. The M108S works great early in the chain, it worked great in the effects loop too, but its strength might just be after your dirt pedals, which can really accentuate and complement each dirt pedal you might be using, plus the volume slider lends itself to work more like a clean boost pedal too.

#### PICKUP SAVIOR?

One of the things I was looking for was the ability improve my guitar's pickups. In this case, it was a Gibson Les Paul, with a Classic '57 humbucker in the neck position. In my experience, I have found the '57 can be muddy or congested in the neck position, especially when playing clean. I tend to like it more with a little bit of gain, but clean tones were just lacking. I have made some adjustments over the years, raised and lowered the pickup, but with no real improvement. When I hooked up the M108S, I was able to reduce the low-end flub that was causing some of that muddy quality and I set the midrange fairly flat. Finally, I slightly boosted the treble, which brought out more clarity, and all together, the mud

was gone. The neck pickup still had that nice, warm, smoky flavor of a PAF, but the bloated tone I did not like disappeared. Given the price of some pickups, adding the MXR EQ pedal was a cheaper alternative, and of course useful for many other applications.

#### WHAT WE LIKE:

Both EQ pedals are super easy to use, and offer a lot of flexibility for tone sculpting abilities, at very modest prices. The updated circuitry is indeed quieter, and the new silver color is sharp. In fact, you might even want two of them, one before any dirt pedals, and a second one after them. One of the great benefits I discovered with these pedals is how you can tweak each guitar's pickups making them better matched to your amp and room conditions. Both the M108S and M109S are handy tools for every guitar player; I preferred the 10-band for the Volume and Gain controls and the smaller incremental impacts at 12db versus 18db, but both offer tremendous value for the money.

#### CONCERNS:

As much as I liked both EQ pedals, there is one significant omission: a lack of presets. It would be hugely useful if you could toggle between different pre-programmed settings. Especially when changing guitars, say between a Telecaster and a Les Paul, the ability to adjust settings on the fly would be great.