



STOMPBOX FEVER

BIXONIC EXPANDORA EXP-2000R

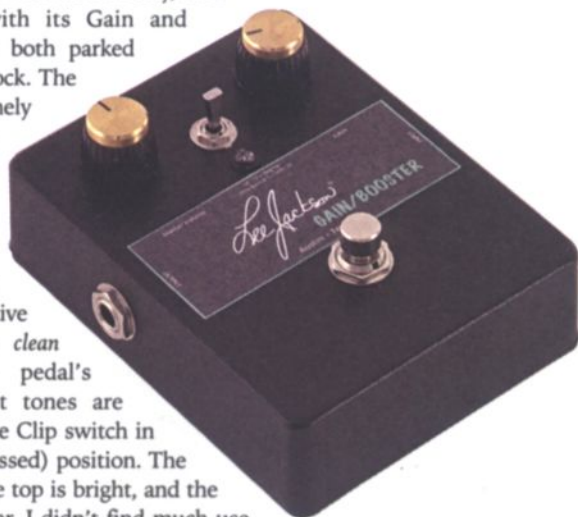
Sometimes reissues are dead-ringers of their original makes, and, other times, they are actually improved upon. In the case of Bixonic's Expandora EXP-2000R reissue (\$200 retail/\$150 street), the latter definitely applies. See, the crux of the original Expandora's mojo are its two internal dip-switches. These tucked-away little buggers voiced the pedal's gain structure, providing everything from lilt-ing grind to over-the-top fuzz. Powerful? Yes. Inconvenient? *Hell* yes! So the EXP-2000R reissue has thankfully solved this problem by placing the dip-switches on the *outside* of the pedal. Sweet. But there's more. The model II EXP-2001 (released a couple years after the original pedal) tweaked the Expandora recipe by sporting a slightly souped-up bass response, and that feature is now switchable via the Ins (Instrument) switch on the EXP-2000R. That's what I call progress, but how does the new Expandora sound?

Sandwiched between a Fender Tele and a Super Reverb, I was greeted with everything from subtle, tube-like breakup to whacked, fuzzed-out saturation. Think of a clearer, more focused sounding Tube Screamer that also allows you to channel Robert Fripp circa-1973, and you'll get the picture. The pedal's three rotary controls—Gain, Tone, and Level—provide more than enough seasoning once you set the two dip-switches to taste. And the Ins switch adds a throaty, yet subtle thwunk behind every note—a nice complement for open-back combos. The EXP-2000R also provides enough virile output to ensure that your tones will be heard loud and clear. Props to Bixonic for refining this now classic stompbox. —Darrin Fox

LEE JACKSON ACTIVE GAIN

One of the new series of pedals by Metaltronix founder Lee Jackson, the solid-state Active Gain (\$169 retail/street price N/A), sports Gain and Volume controls, a 3-position Clip switch, a bright blue LED, a 2.1mm (tip-negative) jack for connecting to an external power supply, and a heavy-duty mechanical bypass switch. The metal enclosure has a black textured finish and the pots, jacks, and switches are neatly handwired to the main circuit board, which is epoxy encapsulated. The 9-volt battery is gripped by a sturdy metal spring clip, and is accessed by removing four screws on the bottom plate.

The Active Gain delivers a beefy, tube-scented tone with its Gain and Volume controls both parked around two o'clock. The output is extremely strong—though the Gain knob has to be cranked up at least halfway to take advantage of it (i.e. the Active Gain is not a *clean* booster). The pedal's strongest, fullest tones are delivered with the Clip switch in the middle (bypassed) position. The bottom is big, the top is bright, and the mids are muscular. I didn't find much use for the other two positions, however, as they sounded somewhat neutered in comparison. With a Strat or a Tele plugged in, and driving a Fender Super Reverb or a mid-sized Kendrick combo, the Active Gain responded in an amp-like manner, delivering plenty of bright, toothy grind and cleaning up reasonably well when I turned down my guitar. What I like best about the Active Gain is that it doesn't introduce any appreciable coloration to your amp's sound—it just makes everything sound bigger and badder. —Art Thompson



LEE JACKSON ACTIVE GAIN

KUDOS

Keeps your basic amp sound intact. Clip switch provides three voicing options.

CONCERNS

Loss of punch and vibe with the Clip switch set to the top or bottom position.

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