

XOTIC

XW-1

By Matthew Holliman

Late-'60s, Italian-built Vox wahs are among the most sought-after vintage effects, and can set you back considerably in cash, depending on the condition. For those of us who can't splurge on the real deal, there are plenty of cheaper options that capture the vintage vibe and add modern functionality that vintage units can't match. One of the newest contenders is Xotic Effects XW-1, a relatively featherweight and compact unit that's sonically derived from the original Clyde McCoy wah but adds a whole lot more tone-shaping versatility.

Smaller Size, Huge Control

The most readily noticeable deviation from traditional wah design is the XW-1's small size. Xotic says it's about 20 percent smaller than most conventional wahs, and it certainly feels unusual underfoot at first. Regardless of proportions, the construction is exemplary and the layout is smart. Four small pots on the right side of the unit adjust bias, wah Q, and +15 dB for both treble and bass. Turning up the bias control tightens bass response and increases overall output. Wah Q widens or narrows the filter peak within the pedal's sweep.

Removing four bottom-plate screws enables access to the 9V battery adapter and four additional frequency-shaping controls. A little red box mounted to the PC board is home to four DIP switches that modify toe-down range, input gain, presence cut, and wah-Q frequency. Activating the toe-down DIP adds emphasis to high frequencies. Presence cut has a smoothing effect on high end. The wah-Q DIP gives the more vowel-like parts of the sweep a deeper, heavier feel and tone that can turn into a guttural growl with the right combo of humbuckers and gain. The input-gain DIP, meanwhile, boosts output by up to 6 dB.

Gold-contact relay-bypass switching prevents the nasty activation click that curses many effects. Foot-treadle tension can be adjusted with the side-mounted hex nut, and the sweep range can be altered with the screw mounted on the bottom heel of the footpad. Oh yeah, there's an LED indicator too—a feature that's inexplicably rare on wahs and which, in this case, earns the Xotic designers big bonus points and thanks from gigging players.



Rockin' the Block

Throwing the XW-1 into the melee of a band rehearsal was a great test of its malleability. When I paired it with an Orange OR50 and a Fender Stratocaster, output dropped a touch upon engaging the wah. So I unscrewed the footplate and twisted the internal trimpot a third of a turn. While that setting worked great for single coils, when I switched to my Gibson Les Paul, I wanted less output. Needless to say, it left me wishing that the control was mounted externally. Thankfully, you can use the external bias control to reduce or boost the output a touch, but it does affect the tone considerably.

The XW-1 is designed to best approximate a vintage Vox Clyde McCoy model with all the external controls at noon. Having never played one of these coveted relics, I can't say how effectively it replicates the minutiae of a Clyde's performance. However it has the very round, vocal voicing that makes the original Clyde a subject of gearhead lust in spades.

Placing an Analog Man Sun Face (a Fuzz Face clone) after the XW-1 proved to be a killer combination for generating wide-open Hendrix wail, but these "traditional" wah applications are just the beginning of what the Xotic can do.

Besides the physical responsiveness of the unit, the changes to frequency response available via the wah-Q control can be profound. At times I had to adjust my regular wah motion to accommodate for the extra vocal range, but that extra range opens up a ton of possibilities. Major setting adjustments change the feel of the wah considerably. For instance, if you're used to finding your classic, half-cocked SRV tone at the treadle's halfway point, you'll have to rethink your phrasing and be a lot more surgical about your pedal throws. But curious tinkerers will be rewarded with enhanced expressiveness and a tone palette that will keep you well out of the same-old-wah-moves rut.

Through the course of testing, I usually left the XW-1's presence-cut DIP switch engaged. Interestingly, though, I found the combination of my Les Paul and Fender Twin Reverb much more expressive with it on. Single-coils, for obvious reasons, benefit the most from the presence cut control, especially with the Stratocaster's

bridge pickup driving a fuzz and an Orange amplifier set for brighter output.

The Verdict

The Xotic XW-1 is one of the most versatile wah pedals I have ever laid foot upon—it sounds fantastic. With controls for shaping and fine-tuning nearly every frequency that ever made a wah a joy (or wonderfully unruly), it can go from glass-shattering highs to swampy lows, and everything in between. And the extent to which you can tailor it to your rig is both impressive and potentially invaluable.

Its price tag is fairly substantial, but it's still in line with great boutique wahs by RMC and Fulltone, to name a few. My only issues with the design were that the input-gain trimpot isn't accessible on the fly, and that the small footprint can feel a little odd at first. Everyone is trying to economize space on their pedalboard these days, but there's something deeply satisfying about having a big ol' chunk of metal underfoot to control my wah

whimsy—or maybe I just have big feet. But my ears don't lie, and the Xotic XW-1 sounds positively amazing. 

 **CLICK TO WATCH A REVIEW DEMO** of this pedal at premierguitar.com/may2015

RATINGS

Xotic Effects XW-1

\$236 street
xotic.us

Tones	
Ease of Use	
Build/Design	
Value	

PROS Superb tone-shaping control. Very fuzz friendly.

CONS Internal input-gain trimpot can't be adjusted on the fly.

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