

CELESTIAL EFFECTS

Aries Beast

BY JORDAN WAGNER

Celestial Effects' Aries Beast Distortion is a pedal worthy of its astrological namesake. It's intense, forceful, and hot-blooded. And while countless pedals have attempted to crack the heavy-amp-in-a-box code with mixed results, the Aries gets very close, thanks to a unique EQ section with two flexible gain stages.

God of War

The Aries' two gain stages are op-amp driven. One has no clipping stage, and it cascades into the second op-amp stage, which uses MOSFET clipping diodes. The very different voices of the two gain stages—and the fact they can be adjusted individually—is critical to the variety of distorted tones. The first stage, which is controlled by a single knob—gain—sounds open and wide. The clipping-diode stage has a tighter, more compressed sound and is controlled by the drive knob.

The Beast's 3-band EQ is key to the pedal's sonic possibilities. Treble blends the signal coming from the treble capacitor with the signal going to the bass and mids controls. Turning it up reduces overall volume a bit, while turning it down adds bass and midrange. Reps from Celestial say they could have defeated the loss in volume with a larger treble cap, but found that the smaller cap gave the pedal the voice they were after. Celestial also designed the circuit with as little noise filtering as possible

in order to maximize signal pass. The unit can be powered with a 9V battery, a center-negative 9V adapter, or an 18V center-negative adapter, the latter of which yields higher headroom.

Zodiac Killer

With a Gibson Les Paul, a Soldano Lucky 13, and the Aries' controls at noon, the pedal unleashed a brutal, meaty distortion. The midrange was cutting, with a trace of cocked-wah honk—but with a very muscular body underneath. It reminded me a lot of Alice in Chains and early *Undertow*-era Tool, and was perfect for heavy dropped-D riffing and sustained leads on low notes. Not too many high-gain distortion pedals highlight mids this prominently, and according to Celestial that *was* a design goal. The mid sweep is very wide, and the pedal's more dimensional midrange has presence akin to a cranked Marshall. The Aries' EQ section, too, has a very Marshall-like response and feel. The mids and lows react interestingly to changes from the treble knob—rising and receding in prominence along a nice, even curve as I increased or reduced high end.

The gain section is interactive and varied, too. Lowering the gain to 10 o'clock and increasing the drive to 3 o'clock yielded fierce, Dual Rectifier-like growl with searing highs and tight lows—perfect for palm-muted riffing. The midrange control, meanwhile, is both sensitive

and rangy at these drive levels—making it a cinch to achieve heavy, scooped Dimebag Darrell tones. Raising gain to 2 o'clock and dropping drive to 11 o'clock expanded the harmonic content of the low end and opened up the high end, yielding a crunchy, British-style overdrive that was smooth and extraordinarily touch responsive.

And when I lowered the volume controls on my Les Paul, the roaring distortion morphed into a sweet, purring, plexi-like overdrive.

The Verdict

For all-out aggressive distortion with amp-like responsiveness, it's hard to go wrong with the Celestial Effects Aries Beast Distortion. It has more than

enough gain to satisfy the can't-get-enough-dirt set. Its onboard EQ and dual distortion circuits offer a lot of versatility, and it's a sturdy mother of a pedal. All the range in the EQ and drive section means it demands a little practice and get-acquainted time. But the investment will, for many, reveal a thrilling and uncommonly versatile distortion tool. **PG**



RATINGS

PROS Muscular, touch-responsive distortion. Wide-ranging, interactive controls. Built like a rock.

CONS Can be difficult to balance dirty tones with an amp's clean channel.

Tones
 Ease of Use
 Build/Design
 Value

\$179 street
 celestialeffects.com



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