

EBS OctaBass

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Sweden's EBS has been making some pretty bitchin' equipment recently, and EBS amps have become the gear of choice among many European pros. Although EBS amps and effects are still fairly rare in the U.S., American bassists may soon beat a path to the company's door if it keeps putting out gear like the Octabass pedal.

The Octabass takes your signal, synthesizes a tone one octave below, and then mixes that back into your original signal. It's a no-nonsense unit, with just two knobs and an on/off switch. But don't be fooled by appearances: there's also a lot to be said for the rock-solid construction, and Jumbo the elephant probably couldn't crush this beast. The rubber-coated knobs feel great, and the pots turn with a nice, smooth resistance, although the shafts are a little wobbly and the knobs on the tester came off with a gentle tug. (EBS tells us the knobs are now glued to the shafts.)

We pitted the Octabass against the Boss Octave pedal, one of our long-time favorite stomp boxes and one of the 101 Amazing Bargains in last month's issue. (We've been told that Boss has discontinued the Octave, although you can still find them around.) The result? The Octabass won hands down, with a far superior sound, much less glitching, and the ability to go even lower - all the way down to open A with no problem.

Curiously, plugging through the Octabass - even with the effect turned off - boosts your signal by several decibels, indicating that the circuit doesn't have a true bypass mode. (If this is a problem, you can change the internal connection to achieve unity gain in bypass mode.) The boost is clean enough, though, with just a hint of added hiss. Kick in the effect, and your tone instantly becomes huge. With the Boss unit, the octave tone by itself is somewhat electronic-sounding; the Octabass's is much more smooth and musical, blending in better with the straight signal and providing a much richer sound. When you hold a note, the Octabass continues to track it flawlessly until it's nearly inaudible. (Try that with the Boss pedal and you end up



with glitchy garbage after only a few seconds.) You can even get away with two notes at once; the Octabass isn't perfect with double-stops, but the resulting sound is much smoother than the gurgling mush spewed out when you play chords through the Boss unit. A Music Man StingRay sent through the Octabass yielded one of the coolest tones we've ever heard, with a crisp top end married to a tight, beefy, plain-old phat bottom. There are a few peculiarities with the Octabass. For starters, you'll have to get used to an input jack on the left side panel, with the output on the right. (Do they drive on the left side of the road in Sweden?) Also, turning off the effect causes a momentary dropout of signal, which might be annoying if you want to switch it mid-passage. (We're told that this hasn't been observed in other units and may be unique to our test unit.) And the knobs on our test Octabass didn't like to be turned while a signal was going through - loud crackles sometimes resulted. (EBS says that the noise was probably caused by oxidation in the pots and isn't typical.) But these anomalies in no way diminish the monster sound of the EBS Octabass. How low can you go?

Construction: 5 of 5, **Electronics:** 4 of 5

Sound: 5 of 5, **Ease of use:** 5 of 5, **Value:** 5 of 5,

Bottom Line: The heaviest sound around