



FIRST PLAY



**BLACKSTAR DEBUT 50R
1X12 COMBO**
£209

WHAT IS IT? Dual-channel lightweight combo with 50 watts of Class D power (switchable down to five), stereo headphones/line out, series effects loop and two colour schemes

First Rate

Blackstar takes a break from floorboard amps and effects and expands its affordable practice amp range for gigging guitarists

Words Nick Guppy Photography Olly Curtis

Over the past few months we've seen some truly revolutionary products from Blackstar, including the ultra-lightweight all-valve St James range and the Amped 1 and 2 compact pedalboard amplifiers. The Northampton-based amp builder's constantly evolving product catalogue caters for all guitarists, from beginner to touring professional, and while recent releases have focused on more experienced players, Blackstar pays just as much attention to players at the beginning of their journeys with the superb Debut 10 and Debut 15 amplifiers.

For those ready to move up from a home practice amp to their first gig-worthy amp that won't break the bank, there's an exciting new addition to the range that we're taking a look at here: the Debut 50R 1x12 combo. Like all Blackstar products, the new amp benefits from smart, modern styling that wouldn't look out of place in any stage or studio environment. Two different colours extend the Debut 50's appeal, with a choice of black vinyl and basket-weave grille, or this very cool cream and oxblood version, which has plenty of lounge-friendly vintage appeal.

The Debut 50's custom-design 12-inch loudspeaker sits on a ported baffle, which helps project bass and low midrange, while the electronics sit inside a steel tray chassis, which also forms the top and rear control panels. Neatly laid out circuit boards and minimal wiring give off an impression of solid reliability, typical of all Blackstar products we've seen, and this amp benefits from a universal mains input, so it can't be accidentally plugged into the wrong voltage.

There are two footswitchable channels for clean and overdrive, with a single volume control for the Clean channel aided by a push-button Bright switch. The Overdrive channel controls include gain, volume and a shared three-band EQ enhanced by Blackstar's patented ISF (Infinite Shape Feature), which continuously varies the tone network between classic USA and classic British for a wide variety of subtle tone effects. The preamp uses discrete MOSFET (metal oxide semiconducting field effect) transistors arranged in a similar way to classic valve amp designs, for authentic valve-like distortion sounds, while the

1. The Debut 50R's Clean channel is based on Blackstar's HT-20 MkII valve amp and sounds warm and dynamic, with a Bright switch to boost highs when needed. Both channels share the same EQ controls, which include Blackstar's patented ISF (Infinite Shape Feature). The colour co-ordinated control panel and knobs look super cool

2. You have a choice of two different but equally impressive reverb effects: Plate and Hall. Plate has a little more high-end sizzle, while the Hall is slightly darker and warmer

3. The Overdrive channel has separate gain and volume controls for maximum flexibility when dialling in your favourite sounds. There's a ton of gain available to get you into the metal zone, but plenty of space in the lower quarter of the gain knob's travel for subtler effects



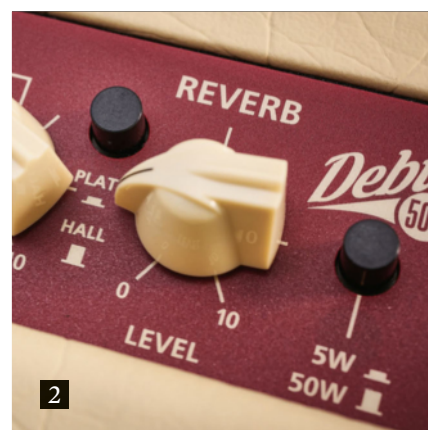
Blackstar has elevated the humble practice amp into a seriously good, very giggable combo

Class D power amplifier adds the benefit of easy portability. This carries over to the loudspeaker, which borrows technology from Blackstar's exclusive Celestion Zephyr design for light weight yet plenty of power handling.

Reverb comes courtesy of another custom Blackstar design, with a choice of Hall or Plate models, and there's an output level button, which lowers the Debut's output power from 50 watts down to a more manageable five watts for home use. Other rear-panel features include a series effects loop, a speaker-emulated line out for recording, which also doubles as a headphones socket, and a line-in for backing tracks. There's also a slot for a Kensington security lock, which makes the Debut 50R ideal for public areas such as unmanaged rehearsal studios. Overall, this combo is typical Blackstar: good-looking, compact and easy to carry.

Feel & Sounds

Based on Blackstar's HT-20 MkII, the Clean channel has plenty of headroom, making it an ideal partner for pedals. The Bright switch subtly lifts high frequencies, adding sparkle to single coils and a little extra snap to warm humbuckers. With the ISF control, you can change this channel's tonal centre to approximate classic American and British cleans for added authenticity when you're emulating a particular sound. Add a Strat and some delay and you can go from Hank Marvin to The Edge, while humbuckers can be coaxed into a jazz-

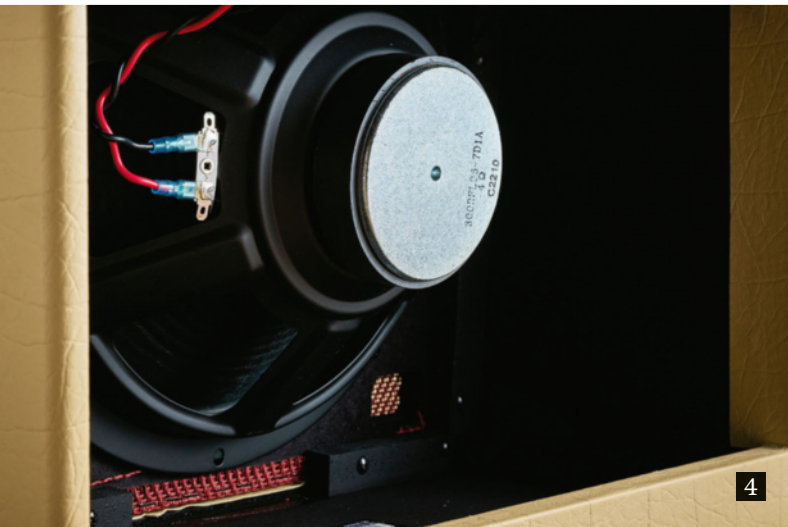


approved growly warmth at moderate volume, as well as getting that classic butter-sweet funk rhythm tone from the neck and bridge together.

The Overdrive channel is based on the award-winning St James 6L6 amp and is equally rewarding to play, with dynamic Tweed-influenced blues and classic rock tones that respond naturally to how hard you hit the strings. All these sounds live in the first quarter of the Gain knob's travel, from which you can deduce there's tons of drive and distortion available to handle any genre up to modern metal.

Careful preamp design that mimics valve circuit behaviour and the powerful ISF-enhanced EQ make it easy to dial in practically any overdrive tone you want, while the reverb sweetens the decay for stadium-like sounds at bedroom volume levels. There's a choice of Hall or Plate





4

4. The Debut 50R's loudspeaker is a custom design that borrows technology from the exclusive Celestion Zephyr used in Blackstar's award-winning St James amps, combining high power and light weight without neodymium magnets

5. The rear panel features include a series effects loop, a speaker-emulated stereo line out, a line in and a footswitch socket for a two-button switch that toggles the channels and reverb effect. There's also a slot for a Kensington security lock to stop your amp from going AWOL



5

models and it's just down to personal taste which you prefer: the Hall is slightly warmer and darker, while the Plate has more high-frequency emphasis.

Another less obvious benefit is the headphones/line out socket, which is stereo and speaker-emulated, so you not only hear a great sound for practice but you can plug into a console and record it as well. Prod the output level switch and the Debut 50R's full 50 watts of Class D power is unleashed, with plenty of volume from the custom 12-inch loudspeaker to handle most smaller gigs without using the line out.

Verdict

In the real world where most of us live, it's not always practical – or possible – to justify spending huge sums of money on high-end guitar amplification, but that shouldn't mean losing out on great tone and

the enjoyment of playing guitar. With its new Debut 50R, Blackstar has elevated the humble practice amp into a seriously good and very giggable combo.

We love its plug-in-and-go simplicity; with no presets to tweak or patches to save, what you see is essentially what you get and it only takes a few seconds to dial in. Add the reliability and consistency of the solid-state format, plus the sub-10kg payload and you should already be interested.

But the clincher here is surely the Debut 50R's asking price. For the cost of a couple of pints north of 200 quid, all this can be yours, making Blackstar's new runner practically a dead cert in the race to become this year's best-selling small combo. With two very handsome colour options to choose from, there's no excuse – and we think the Debut 50R is likely to be around for a long time. **G**



BLACKSTAR DEBUT 50R 1X12 COMBO

PRICE: £209

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Analogue solid-state preamp/
Class D power amp

OUTPUT: 50W RMS into 4ohms, switchable to 5W

DIMENSIONS: 460mm (w) x 205mm (d) x
375mm (h)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 8.9/19.5

CABINET: Particle board

LOUDSPEAKER: 1x12 Blackstar custom design

CHANNELS: 2, with footswitchable overdrive
and reverb

CONTROLS: Clean volume, clean channel bright
switch, gain, volume, bass, middle, treble, ISF
(Infinite Shape Feature), reverb level. Overdrive
select switch, reverb plate/hall switch, power
output switch

FOOTSWITCH: FS-8 footswitch (not supplied)
toggles clean/overdrive channels and reverb

ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Stereo headphones/
line out, line in, series effects loop, Kensington
security lock slot

OPTIONS: The FS-8 footswitch is £49.99

RANGE OPTIONS: The Debut 15 combo sells for
£86; the Debut 10 is £70

Blackstar Amplification Ltd

01604 817817

www.blackstaramps.com



9/10

PROS Very affordable first amp for budding
band members; quality clean and overdrive
channels; brilliant pedal platform; excellent
reverbs; impressive price

CONS Hard to fault at this price – though
the higher gain metal sounds do lose some
dynamic range and the reverb tails could do
with being a little longer