



Blackstar TV-10 B

The British amp wizards once again succeed in making boutique tones affordable

By Amit Sharma

FROM HAND-WIRED VINTAGE-STYLE showpieces to modern high-gain amp juggernauts, Blackstar is the kind of company that can do it all and do it well.

But perhaps the one thing it should be applauded for more than anything else is bringing boutique tube amp sounds to just about any kind of guitar player out there – marrying tone, durability and affordability better than arguably any other guitar amp brand to emerge over the last two decades.

Build quality

This latest combo amp is the British-voiced sibling of the TV-10 A, and naturally uses an EL34 power tube in place of the 6L6 found on the other model, though beyond that, the specs are pretty much the same.

As for first impressions, it definitely seems like Blackstar has been upping its game – not that there was anything particularly wrong with the look of its earlier small combo amps – but there’s definitely more of a classy aesthetic to its latest innovations.

This combo comes in an olive finish with gold piping, plus a salt and pepper grill cloth, which means it’s incredibly inviting to play.

Usability

Right off the bat, that sense of sophistication spills over into how it sounds, with our Custom Shop Masterbuilt Stratocaster going straight in and all controls set to noon.

With only four dials, it’s very user-friendly, covering almost everything you could possibly want for practising, rehearsing and smaller gigs.

In fact, it’s deceptively full and loud for a 10-watt combo, thanks to the combination of the clever circuitry and the Celestion Seventy 80 1x12 speaker.

It comes as little surprise that the digital reverb emulates a classic spring tank very nicely indeed, and at the back you’ll also find a series effects loop if you want to use your own ambiance.

There’s a foot-switchable boost to give you that all-important lift for solos to cut through, though players who depend on a fully

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customizable second channel will need something more feature-rich.

Sounds

With the gain set low, you’re in vintage JTM45 territory, and what you hear is very musical and warm – ideal for a woody blues that allows the instrument in your hands to shine.

It’s a sound that will inspire almost every kind of player, with a perfect balance of dynamic range and natural compression to help the notes ring.

Turn it up a bit more and you’ll recognize a familiar Plexi crunch that will suit all your favourite Cream and Led Zeppelin classics with no need for extra pedals, especially if you’re using a humbucker-equipped guitar like my own 1969 Gibson Les Paul Custom.

Beyond that, the TV-10 B can deliver a harder rock sound that goes a little further than the early Marshalls that inspired it, though still avoids anything too modern-leaning.

There is only one Tone dial, and of course in an ideal world you’d have a three-band EQ, but it’s worth remembering this is an amp with old-school roots – that very notion of simplicity is quite possibly the key selling point. The TV-10 B also functions well as a pedal platform amp.

We stacked an Ibanez TS808HW Tube Screamer with a Boss Blues Driver and a Ceriatone Centura with minimal noise or fuzz.

Higher gain players will be the ones most affected by the lack of three-band EQ, meaning they’ll probably need a bass control on their pedal of choice in order to tighten things up, and modulations like the MXR Phase 90, Pedal Pawn Gypsy Vibe and Dawner Prince Starla

GUITAR WORLD VERDICT



The TV-10 B is both loud and proud while also being compact and classy. The direct out could be better, but what it truly excels at is simplicity – breathtaking sounds with just four knobs. For many of us, that’s all you can ask for.

PROS

- + Beautiful sounds and very easy to use.
- + Unbeatable in terms of value for money.
- + Very classy aesthetics.

CONS

- Emulated out is a little sterile.
- No three-band EQ.

SPECS

TYPE: Tube combo
ORIGIN: China
OUTPUT: 10 Watts RMS
SPEAKER: 1x 12” Celestion Seventy 80
CHANNELS: One
CONTROLS: Gain, Tone, Reverb, Master, Boost
CONNECTIVITY: Emulated/headphone out, series effects loop with level switch, three speaker outs
FOOTSWITCH: Included (boost)
WEIGHT: 32.4lbs / 14.7kg
DIMENSIONS (WXHxD): 473 x 421 x 251 mm

Tremolo can really intensify the sparkle and shimmer when engaged, tapping into more esoteric and ethereal musical realms.

Verdict

Clearly there’s a lot to like here, though the emulated/headphone output for recording or running direct through a PA is a bit hit-and-miss – it may come in handy for some users but doesn’t seem to carry the same kind of sonic weight as hearing the amp traditionally. It feels like more of an afterthought than an integral feature.

Perhaps that’s because this nostalgic combo isn’t necessarily trying to be cutting edge, it’s more of a plug-in-and-play kind of design that specializes in vintage romance, which it brings in abundance. Could this be the most impressive tube amp under \$700? For simpler needs, we definitely think it’s up there.

