

GEAR Bench Test



Mesa/Boogie Express Series 5:25

TESTED BY ART THOMPSON

SPECS | Mesa/Boogie Ltd., (707) 778-6565; mesaboogie.com

CHANNELS	Two
KNOBS	(Both channels) Gain, Treble, Mid, Bass, Reverb, Master, Contour
SWITCHES	Clean/Crunch, Blues/Burn, Channel select, Contour select, Duo-Class (25 watts/5 watts)
REVERB	Spring
FOOTSWITCH	Three-button, included
POWER	25 watts or 5 watts
TUBES	Two EL84 output tubes, five 12AX7A preamp tubes
UTILITIES	Effects loop switching jacks for channel select, reverb on/off, Contour on/off, one 8Ω, and two 4Ω speaker jacks
SPEAKER	Mesa/Boogie Vintage Black Shadow 10"
WEIGHT	38 lbs
KUDOS	Superb tonal range. Light and compact. Footswitchable Contour function. Patented Duo-Class circuitry allows it to operate at 5 watts in single-ended configuration.
CONCERNS	Control labels are difficult to read. Multi-pin footswitch cable could be tricky to replace at a gig if lost or damaged.

EVOLVING FROM PREVIOUS MESA/BOOGIE circuit designs—including those of the Mark I, Studio .22, Lone Star, and Stiletto—the new Express Series 5:25 (along with its bigger brother, the 5:50) features dual independent channels, each with two footswitchable modes, footswitchable Contour controls (which allow you to adjust the overall EQ curve of each channel), and a spring reverb with independent level controls. The 5:25 develops 25 watts from a pair of EL84s running in class AB. Thanks to its patented Duo-Class power switching, the amp can also drop down to 5 watts in single-ended class A.

The 5:25's stout assortment of features also includes switching jacks (for selecting channels, and activating the reverb and Contour functions from a master external switcher), an effects loop, and a trio of speaker outs (Mesa encourages experimenting with various impedance combinations as a means of tailoring the amp's dynamic response). The footswitch included with the 5:25 is a metal, three-button type that connects to the amp

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using a special cable with multi-pin connectors. Each switch has an LED indicator, and the unit packs into a protective nylon bag to keep it from damaging anything in the back of the cabinet

The chassis slips out easily for inspection, and the interior construction is clean and rugged with most of the circuit components (including the preamp tube sockets) mounted on a large PC board. The power-tube sockets reside on a smaller sub board, and all of the pots mount directly to the front panel. The recessed control panel is well protected from damaging encounters with door jams and such, however, it's difficult to see the small labels for the controls and switches unless you're looking at them straight on. Tiling the amp back, or placing it on a stand definitely helps.

The smallest combo in the Mesa/Boogie line, the 5:25 is easy to carry, and it takes up little parking space. Despite its size, however, it's an impressive sounding amp. Twenty-five watts is a decent amount of power, but what helps give the 5:25 its kick is the patented Dyna-Watt technology, which basically heightens the power supply's response to your picking attack. This "flashbulb"-like dynamic effect is followed by a smooth decay into power compression, which also enhances sustain. When you stop playing for even an instant, the power supply recharges itself to prepare for another burst. The concept is intended to make the amp sound and feel punchier on clean stuff,

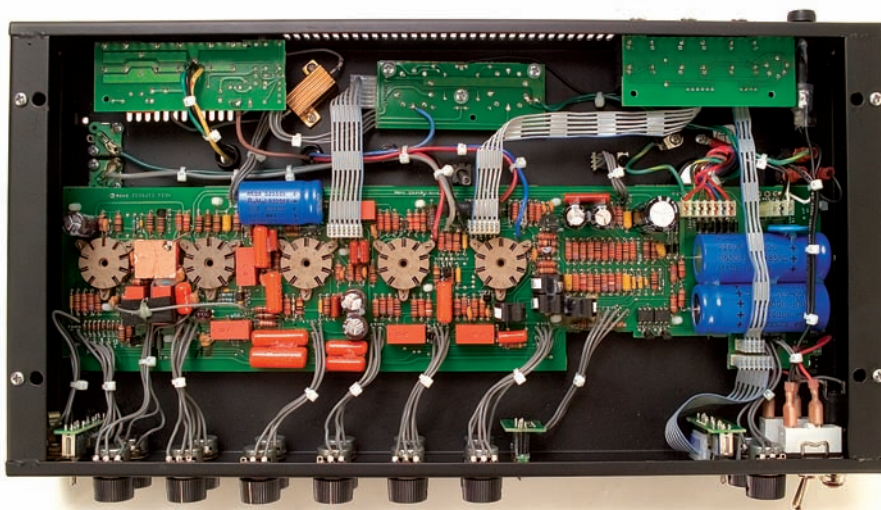
while providing a creamier response on heavily overdriven textures. This dynamic enhancement is especially cool for lower-volume work, though Dyna-Watt has just as much effect when you're running the amp flat out.

The 5:25 delivered more than enough volume to handle live situations with bass and drums. Even with the Duo-Class switch in the 5-watt setting, the amp still sounded tight and focused.

A pair of 2-position mini toggles allow you to set the overall gain structure for both channels. For Channel 1 you get Clean and Crunch settings, and for Channel 2 the selections are Blues and Burn. This simple system makes it easy to configure the amp for any style of music you play. The Clean setting offers plenty of headroom for keeping your rhythms crisp and detailed at higher volumes. Switch to Crunch, and the Gain control brings on the grind as you turn it up. Using just these two settings, I was able to get a nice selection of sounds from Channel 1 that covered everything from clear, sweet jazz tones to stout rock overdrive. And even when going for heavier grind, the amp remained very dynamic and responsive to changes in guitar volume. Single-coils sounded excellent through this channel—very warm and full—as did humbuckers with minor tweaks of the well-voiced tone controls.

Switching to Channel 2 opens the door

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The 5:25's chassis reveals panel-mounted pots, which are wired to the PC boards that grip most of the other components.



The 5:25's rear panel sports remote switching jacks, an effects loop, and a trio of speaker jacks.

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to a huge jump in overdrive potential. In the blues setting, the sounds are meaner and more Marshall-like, with bold midrange presence, good low-end mass, and enough top-end bite to make humbuckers sing clearly. Here, too, the tones have great dynamic response, and the feel of playing a bigger amp is unmistakable—even at very low volumes.

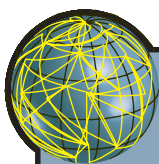
Flicking the mini-toggle to the Burn position unleashes a torrent of distortion as you inch up the Gain knob. It was easy to get

super-sustaining tones reminiscent of an old Boogie MK I's. The amp really screams in this mode when cranked up in the 25-watt setting, while switching to 5-watt operation reduces volume, but more importantly, provides an enhanced sense of tonal complexity as rich harmonics blossom around every note—one of the welcome byproducts of single-ended class A operation.

The separate Reverb knobs make it easy to dial in both channels for just the right amount of warm, airy effect. Delivered by the 3-spring tank and all-tube powered drive/recovery circuit, the 'verb textures are sweet and effusive, providing nice dimensional enhancement at lower settings and a decent amount of surfy sprogging when turned up. Another set of functions that make the 5:25 such a capable mini amp are its Contour controls. Selectable on either or both channels via front-panel switches (or by footswitch) the Contour knobs let you add in a preset EQ curve that scoops out the mids while boosting the highs and lows. This is not a "metal" preset like you find on some

amps, but, rather, a variable means of enhancing the thump and sparkle to create a bigger sound. Depending on where you set the Contour controls, you can elicit just the right amount of EQ shift to make lead or rhythm parts stand out more effectively without the need to raise the overall volume. The Contour controls can also be bypassed if you don't need them.

Anyway you look at it, the Express 5:25 comes up a winner. This amp offers a bodacious amount of features for such a small package, and its power and dynamic responsiveness make it ideal for those who need a flexible amp that can really deliver in smaller venues. I was constantly amazed by how much sound this little 1x10 combo puts out, and with its ability to power down to Champ wattage, you can readily experience to coolness of playing the "whole" amp without having to use the Master Volume controls to keep a lid on the loudness. If there was ever a "David" in the world of combo amps, the Express 5:25 is it—this thing is a killer! 



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