





ZOOM

The included footswitch controls channel switching and Solo boost functions.

## MESA/BOOGIE

# STILETTO DEUCE AND TRIDENT

TESTED BY TERRY BUDDINGH

British amp companies began using EL34 output tubes in the mid 1960s, and these distinctive-sounding “valves” have contributed greatly to many of the coolest tones in guitar history. Now Mesa/Boogie’s new Stiletto Deuce and Trident amplifiers—both of which come loaded with a bank of these feisty fire bottles—pay homage to the classic British-voiced tones of the past, while also offering an abundance of innovative sound-sculpting features that encourage you to explore and create your own personalized tones.

Unlike some previous Mesa/Boogies that could accommodate EL34s as an alternate tube type, the Stiletto Deuce and Trident are the company’s first amps to be optimized exclusively for EL34s (four in the Deuce, and six in the Trident). While many of their features are similar to those found on previous M/B designs, the Stiletto Deuce and Trident are much more than recycled Rectifiers or Road Kings. In fact, the Stiletto circuitry was designed and fine-tuned to provide a more cutting sonic identity that’s specifically intended to contrast with a Rectifier’s legendary corpulence. That contrast is especially valuable if you play in a two-guitar band that thrives on heavy high-gain tones and textures.

### CUTTING-EDGE CLASSIC

A manufacturer’s sincerity of purpose is reflected in its commitment to quality and attention to detail, and Mesa/Boogie has been an industry leader in this regard for decades. Soft-spoken details such as the Stiletto’s tight-fitting leather corner caps, Harley-worthy chromed-steel top and front vents, arrow-straight piping, and cast-metal nameplates speak volumes about the

builder’s design and craftsmanship. You have to admire Mesa/Boogie’s sense of style, too. The Stiletto Deuce flaunts a badass downtown look via leather front panels that are treated with a special simulated-crocodile embossing process, and further emphasized by a wickedly cool crossed-blade logo.

In addition to this understated street-wise elegance, there are some other subtle exterior details that reveal Mesa/Boogie’s commitment to road-proof durability. For example, the front panel’s mini-toggles have bump-resistant stubby metal handles, and the heavy-duty power switches and skirted knobs are deeply recessed to protect them from impact.

Representative of Mesa/Boogie’s long-standing concern for serviceability, the rugged metal Switchcraft Input and Footswitch jacks, and all of the front-panel control pots (which have stubby solid-metal shafts to minimize breakage), are tightly secured to the front panel and wired with flying leads. Besides facilitating future replacement of these components, this type of construction provides industrial-strength reliability as it mechanically isolates the circuit boards and their solder joints from front-panel stresses.

It’s obvious from these precautionary measures, that the folks at Mesa/Boogie have seen first-hand the results of every form of road abuse imaginable. And they obviously apply this experience to help their amps survive not only the harsh reality of professional touring, but the more torturous day-in/day-out car-trunk existence of the club-, bar-, and wedding-band circuit.

A closer peak underneath the Stiletto’s chrome-plated welded-steel chassis



**INSTANT GRATIFICATION**  
MESA/BOOGIE  
STILETTO DEUCE  
AND TRIDENT

#### WHO'S IT FOR?

Players seeking a wide range of EL34-fueled tones that embrace both the past and the future.

#### KUDOS

Tons of hip features. An astounding range of tantalizing tones. Road-proven durability.

#### CONCERNS

None.

#### PRICE

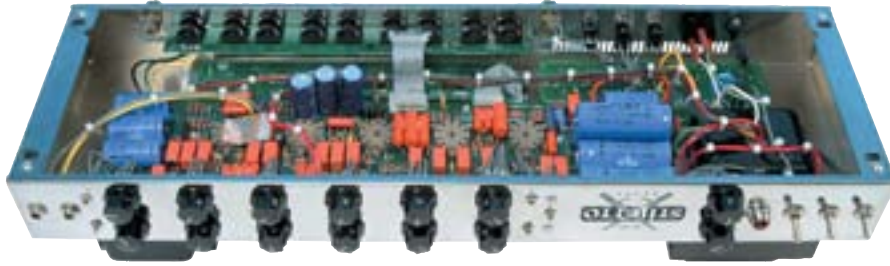
Stiletto Deuce:  
\$1,599 retail  
Street price N/A

Stiletto Trident:  
\$1,699 retail  
Street price N/A

#### CONTACT

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EDITORS' PICK  
AWARD



**Industrial art:** The Stiletto's clean layout and road-proof construction clearly reflect Mesa/Boogie's three-and-a-half decades of hard-won amp building experience.

ZOOM

## MESA/BOOGIE RECTIFIER TRADITIONAL SLANT 4X12

After testing both Stiletto's with a wide variety of cabs, I became extremely impressed by how the focused and punchy sounding Rectifier Traditional slant 4x12 speaker cabinet (\$849 retail/street price N/A) enhanced the Stiletto's aggressive nature. The Rectifier Traditional cabs have the same dimensions as a "traditional" Marshall 4x12, and are smaller than Boogie's oversized Rectifier Standard cabs.

While the larger Standard cabs complement the huge-sounding Rectifier heads—and together they produce massive low-end girth—the smaller Traditional cabs have a tighter low-end, with more midrange "poke."

The test cab came loaded with Mesa/Boogie's proprietary Vintage 30 8Ω speakers, which, according to Mesa/Boogie's Doug West, provide a crisper attack and tighter sound compared to the 16Ω Vintage 30s commonly found in 4x12 cabinets. Most Celestion speakers are now assembled in China, but Mesa/Boogie's are still made in England using old-fashioned air-dried adhesives, instead of modern fast-drying types. (Different adhesives have different weights and other properties, and speakers can be sensitive to these subtle tone-altering differences.)

As with Mesa/Boogie's other cabs, the Rectifier Traditionals are built from 14-ply Baltic birch, with durable steel handles and jack plate, cool leather corner protectors, and M/B's smooth-rolling custom Track-Loc casters. In addition, the jack plate has extra inputs that allow you to split the left and right speaker pairs for stereo or bi-amped operation. —TB

revealed a surprising abundance of neatly laid-out components that testified to the circuit's high level of design sophistication. Nearly two dozen relays perform various circuit-tweaking functions in response to channel Mode changes and other feature selections. A component-level circuit analysis revealed complex relay-controlled circuit reconfigurations and alterations at every pre-amp stage: gain stages are added, bypassed, or rerouted, while various tone-shaping networks are engaged to alter the amp's frequency response and optimize its performance for each selection. The subtlety—as well as the magnitude—of these changes clearly reflects the countless hours spent fine-tuning the Stiletto's circuits. It takes an incredible amount of time to create an amp with this much tonal range and flexibility, and then hone each circuit reconfiguration to perfection, and ultimately make everything easy for the player to understand and use. This ain't no kitchen-table project. Mesa/Boogie's Randall Smith has more experience designing high-gain amps than anyone else on the planet, and the Stiletto is the culmination of his more than 35 years in the amplifier business. Big-league stuff indeed.

### THEY SLICE, DICE, AND A WHOLE LOT MORE

The Stiletto's have two independent channels, each featuring a 3-position Mode switch that affects gain and voicing (more on this later), as well as a switch that reconfigures the output stage for full power or 50-watt (two tube) operation. (The Deuce has four EL34s, so full power is labeled 100 watts, and the six-tube Trident's full-power setting is labeled 150 watts.) This assignability is a really cool feature, as it enables you to configure the output stage to deliver smooth, low-power lead-tone compression, or mighty low-end impact with brutally taut headroom and dynamic range.

This dynamic contrast can be further

enhanced via the assignable rectifier types. Rear-panel toggle switches select either tube or solid-state rectifiers (the Deuce has two 5U4GBEH rectifier tubes, and the Trident has three). And if you're looking for even more deeply burnished '40s- or '50s-style low-voltage looseness, the global Bold/Spongy switch reduces the amp's operating voltages by about 20 percent when set to the Spongy position. An amp's dynamic response is a critical, yet often neglected component of great tone, so props to Mesa/Boogie for exploring new ways of manipulating this essential performance characteristic.

### TONE A LA MODE

The powerful Mode functions are keys to the Stiletto's tonal treasures. For example, Channel 1's Tite Clean setting faithfully recreates vintage circuit topology to provide a wide range of classic '60s- and '70s-era British tones that work well with both thick-sounding humbuckers and lean single-coil pickups. By using different Gain, rectifier, power amp, and Bold/Spongy settings, you can easily conjure Clapton's Blues Breakers snarl, Hendrix's psychedelic screams, Gibbons' grind, and many other fabled Brit-amp textures. In fact, it was easy for me to clone the sound of both a '74 50-watt Marshall non-master head and an Orange Rockerverb 100. The Stiletto's would be impressive if they had only this one channel and Mode, but we're just getting started.

Channel 1's Fat Clean setting substitutes a completely re-voiced first gain stage that can make the skinniest-sounding Tele bridge pickup as plump as a Christmas goose. The Crunch position adds another preamp gain stage to closely approximate a post-1975 master-volume Marshall model 2203/4's higher-gain circuitry. This mode sounded wickedly bright with a vintage-style Strat, but possessed just the right amount of expressive top-end bite to make

a humbucker-equipped PRS McCarty sound simultaneously sweet and vicious.

More modern tones await those who dare to explore the higher-gain realms of Channel 2. For those who just can't get enough JCM 800-inspired glory, Channel 2 begins by replicating Channel 1's highest-gain Crunch mode. The next setting, Tite Gain, displays some modern Mesa/Boogie influence, with a searing presence and stinging attack that begs for 'buckers, while its energized top-end sizzle sounds able to disintegrate anything that gets in its way. Channel 2's aptly named Fluid Drive position activates four preamp gain stages to provide the amp's most extreme levels of overdrive. In contrast to the Stiletto's brighter modes, Fluid Drive is super thick and rich, with a velvet-veiled low-end growl and a warm and viscous top end. It sounds great with single-coils and absolutely luscious with humbuckers.

### CUT TO THE CHASE

Any way you slice it, the Stiletto stand

proud in Mesa/Boogie's storied legacy of relentlessly innovative amp designs. Whether you're considering the 50/100-watt Deuce, or are intrigued by the Trident's additional power and percussive thrust, either of these new sonic weapons would be a worthy addition to even the most formidable and complete amp arsenal. Dressed to impress, brilliantly conceived, and finely honed, the Stiletto pay homage to the past without denying the future—or breaking your bank account. Amidst the current abundance of high-priced one-tone wonders, the Stiletto is an absolutely astounding value—especially when you consider their high level of design sophistication and innovation, remarkable fit and finish, and almost embarrassing wealth of innovative features and great tones. The Stiletto represent another high-water mark as Mesa/Boogie continues to pursue the leading edge of modern amp design. This is going to be a hard act to follow, so take a bow Mesa/Boogie, and here's your Editors' Pick Award. 🏆

### SPECS

- Two footswitchable channels
- Three modes per channel
- Assignable output wattage and rectifier types
- Bypassable FX loop with adjustable Send and Output levels
- Footswitchable Solo level control
- Slave output with level control
- Bold/Spongy high/low voltage switch
- Five Mesa/Boogie 12AX7EH preamp tubes
- Mesa/Boogie EL34EH output tubes (four in the 100-watt Deuce, six in the 150-watt Trident)
- Mesa/Boogie 5U4GBEH rectifier tubes (two in Deuce, three in Trident)