

ROCK'N'ROAD

BORROWING FEATURES FROM THE MIGHTY ROAD KING, MESA'S NEW DO-IT-ALL AMP WRITES A WHOLE NEW CHAPTER ON VERSATILITY. MICK TAYLOR TAKES IT FOR A RIP DOWN FUN-SET STRIP

GBINFO

MESA DUAL RECTIFIER ROADSTER 2X12

PRICE: £2,395 as reviewed. (1x12, £2,295), (head, £2,195)

BUILT IN: USA

TYPE: All-valve 2x12 combo

POWER: 100 or 50 watts, channel assignable

VALVES: 6 x 12AX7, 4 x 6L6, 2 x 504G

FEATURES: 4 independent channels, each with 3 modes. Channel-assignable 50/100-watt power and silicon diode/tube rectifiers. Channel-assignable/footswitchable effects loop with level control, spring reverb, bold/spongy switch, footswitchable 'solo' master volume, slave out, external switching jacks, tuner out, auto bias switch for EL34 tubes, slip cover included

FOOTSWITCH: Mesa 8-button switch included

SPEAKERS: 2x12 inch 60-watt Celestion Vintage 30

DIMENSIONS: 550(h) x 680(w) x 325(d) mm

WEIGHT: 41kg (90.5lbs)

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... Would you believe that it's been well over 15 years since Mesa Boogie unveiled its genre-defining Dual Rectifier amplifier? During that time the truckramp plates, oversized cabinets and uncompromising heavy rock attitude have become synonymous with modern rock and metal music. So much so, in fact, that the brand's reputation for portable, powerful, ultra-versatile combos has become overshadowed for the latest generation of guitar players.

So here, the Californian company has brought the two schools closer together for the Roadster, using technology and features filtered from the range-topping Road King model (see *GB* issue 13). Four channels, with three modes each, plus channel-assignable power ratings, effects loops and rectifiers are just the beginning, after which you can enjoy reverb, a switchable master volume and a built-in power attenuator. Too much? Let's find out...

PRE & POWER AMP

Why is it that most of us can happily use computers and software packages, navigate all kinds of menus in TVs, DVD players and mobile phones, yet when a four-channel guitar amp comes along, we get nervous? More

than one person through the *GB* office has clocked the Roadster and sent their eyebrows skywards at the back panel alone. Well let us make it easy for you: this is four amps in one, and if you start with that mind, there's really no confusion here at all: just set up one channel at a time, and trust your ears to make the decisions.

When setting up your tones, the first thing to choose is your overall character and feel, and this is defined largely by the combination of the 'mode' mini toggle switches on the front panel and their respective gain pots. Channels 1 and 2 have two identical modes: 'clean' and 'fat'. 'Clean' is the lowest gain of all, and offers the best route to the brightest, most sparkling, slightly mid-scooped clean tones in the Roadster. 'Fat' ups the ante slightly with more mid range and bass and, according to Boogie, comes directly from the seminal Mark I model. You might want to think of it as 'clean' with a testosterone injection: bigger balls and more muscle for a harder punch. With the controls set identically in channels 1 and 2, the latter has generally more girth, hinting at its higher gain potential.

The third modes differ in that channel 1 has a 'tweed' setting, which adds some gain and midrange to the 'clean' mode for the kind of sound you'd associate with Fender's classic

MISSION CONTROL

PLAYING THE CHANGES EFFORTLESSLY

■ The Mesa Roadster comes with a dedicated eight-button footswitch.

This veritable smorgasbord of a switcher offers one-touch, silent selection between all four channels, plus reverb on/off, effects loop on/off, 'solo' master volume level and tuner



mute. The last option is a handy feature, whereby you can connect your guitar tuner to the 'tuner out' jack on the Roadster's rear panel. Pushing the corresponding switch on the foot controller mutes the amp's output so you can tune in silence.

tweed amplifiers. Channel 2 meanwhile gets 'Brit' which, as the name suggests, crosses the Atlantic to approximate some of Bletchley's finest flavours; more mid range, less bass and an all-round more punchy response. It's important to point out at this stage that with the gains and EQ set high, there's enough gain in channels 1 and 2 alone for a lot of blues and classic rock players.

Channels 3 and 4 bring the Roadster forward 30 or 40 years, with each featuring identical mode selections. 'Raw' takes you from where channels 1 and 2 leave off, enabling you to still keep things relatively crunchy-clean, veering into a more fluid classic rock lead tone. The next mode, 'vintage', belies its name somewhat, in that it's the classic Dual Rectifier lead sound, according to Boogie. We're talking piles and piles of gain, packed with extra harmonics and overtones. Finally, the 'modern' mode in channels 3 and 4 tightens the low end and adds high end for what Boogie describes as your route to 'hard



■ The truckramp panel hints at menace, but it'll sing beautifully too



■ Four identical sets of knobs, one for each channel: simple

core' sounds. So, we haven't even twisted a knob yet, and already there are 12 completely different characters.

With this in mind the best approach is to dial in some of the sample settings from the manual, or simply run the gains and EQs around half way, then have a stomp through the models and channels. You get a pretty instant picture of each channel/mode's character, which you'll be able to place into your own musical requirements.

There's plenty more on offer to tweak and hone those tones. One brilliant feature in this amp is the ability to assign either 100 or 50 watts to each channel independently. Not only that, but you can also choose tube or solid-state (silicon diode) rectification in any channel. That means, for example, you could set: channel 1 to 'tweed' and 50 watts with a single tube rectifier (like a tweed Twin); channel 2 to 'Brit', 50 watts and diode rectifier (like a Marshall Plexi); channel 3 to 'vintage', 100 watts, two tube rectifiers (Dual Rectifier); and finally channel 4 to 'modern', 100 watts, diode (the ultimate hardcore metal amp). That's versatile, right?

For those of you who maybe haven't had chance to play 50- and 100-watt tube amps side by side, it's not all about volume. Although the latter ultimately has more headroom, the biggest difference is in the feel of the amps; the way the tone talks back to you in terms of hardness/elasticity dynamics and overall harmonic content. Some sounds work better with two tubes, some with four – here, it's great to have the option. Delving deeper, you'd be right to argue that you're still using the same set of

transformers and other components the effect isn't perhaps as marked as it would be in two completely separate amplifiers. Still, rest assured the difference is significant and very worthwhile in the Roadster.

As well as the 50/100-watt options, the Roadster also has a bias switch (protected so you don't accidentally knock it) on the back panel which enables you to run either 6L6 or EL34 output valves. Boogie recommends the former for all-round use, offering 34s as an option for anyone who really wants to nail the British sounds. Also, the front panel gives you the option of 'bold' or 'spongy' power; 'spongy' brings in a built-in power attenuator which drops the voltage and therefore lessens the headroom in the power section. More compressed sounds result, with emphasized dynamics and presence.

Like the vast majority of modern Boogies, the Roadster's guts are spread out around a custom-designed PCB. There's no way you could reasonably do all this in a hand-wired amp and besides, Randall Smith and co are firm believers that PCB amps sound every bit as good, as long as they're designed and built right. In that respect, the folks in Petaluma have always been fastidious about quality, and as such you get a hardy steel chassis, top-quality pots, switches and general components. On a personal note, I know people who have questioned Mesa's reliability credentials. Well, I've owned most of 'em, having one in the boot of my car more or less constantly for the past 15 years. I've never had one break down or require any kind of servicing, not once. Yes, all amps can go wrong, but I've seen many more brands' amps give up the ghost long

before the Boogs. We've no reason to expect anything less of the Roadster.

CABINET & SPEAKERS

As a practical point, you should know that the Roadster is up there with the heaviest 2x12 combos we've ever encountered at GB. Sure, it's the tone that matters ultimately, but the Roadster is the first amp in living memory that I've personally dreaded hauling to gigs and rehearsals. Maybe I'm getting old, but if you suspect you might feel the same, we'd thoroughly recommend a flightcase: two handles, two people and wheels, although thankfully the Roadster comes with Boogie's heavy-duty castors.

The basic box is standard fare for Boogie; marine-grade birch ply, and swathed in a high-quality leather-type vinyl: even with heavy use, it'll last longer than whoever owns it, that's for certain. That said, I still don't understand the leather corner 'protectors', but we've said that so many times it's becoming a GB cliché. Stylistically, you get a black, metal truck-ramp insert on the front panel which underlines the Dual Rectifier heritage: we think it looks brilliant, though more conservative types may assume it's only a metal amp as a result: far, far from the case.

Where the Roadster 2x12 (and 1x12) differs from the majority of other Boogie combos is the closed-back design. This is designed to offer the kind of projection and bottom-end response you'd expect from a 4x12 speaker cabinet. Inside, you'll find a pair of Celestion Vintage 30 speakers which are rated at 60-watts apiece, a figure that belies their ability to deal with the Roadster's considerable power. These are high-efficiency drivers, and you simply won't believe the size and spread of the tone they chuck out in this cabinet. Even so, at just 68cm wide, and 55cm tall, it's relatively compact for a 2x12.

SOUNDS

What's immediately impressive is how the Roadster can move effortlessly from bright, mid-light clean tones with lots of bottom-end bloom and colour, through much tighter, harder crunch sounds, then on to the most menacing, grinding distortion. Most amplifiers tend to have an overall colour, even if they're multi-channel beasts, but the voicing decisions at the mode switches and the extremely powerful EQ genuinely make the Roadster's

channels sound like different amplifiers, albeit in the same box.

In fact, understanding the EQ is crucial here. The treble, mid, bass and presence pots all have a huge effect on the gain structure and colour, with extremes of each available. In that respect you have to be careful when setting up tones; vintage-style sounds in channel one are brittle if you're not spot on with the treble and presence. Likewise, it's tempting to dial in lots of bass which soon becomes overpowering, particularly if the Roadster is in the corner of a room, at a cramped pub gig, for example. This 2x12 version is much better with more room on stage, so you can take



■ The Roadster has a closed back: unusual for a Mesa combo

OOH LA LOOP

ON OR OFF. IN OR OUT

■ Not every player uses an amp's effects loop, so here Mesa gives you plenty of options.

First up, you can choose to have the loop switched globally in or out (as an aside, you need it in to access the 'solo' master volume function). Switching it out hard bypasses the whole section, which is good news for anyone of the opinion that effects loops compromise the

straight-up tone of the amp. Indeed, they're rarely, if ever, tonally transparent.

With the effects loop switched in, you can then choose to have the loop assigned to any or all of the channels, with a footswitch option to turn it on and off. Complete with a level knob to match all kinds of effects devices, you really couldn't ask for much more than that – it's all very impressive.



DETAILS

THE ROADSTER OFFERS VERSATILITY, BRILLIANT DESIGN AND BUILD, AND TOP-CLASS TONE



■ Cabs galore: you have all the options



■ Each channel has these options: very cool



■ There's plenty of scope to tweak those tones



GBCONCLUSION

BOOGIE LEAVES US WANTING FOR NOTHING EXCEPT A BIGGER BANK BALANCE

■ There are a lot of versatile amps on the market, but what makes this stand out tonally is not merely the distance between ultimate clean and dirty, moreover it's the way it fills in the gaps which, let's be honest, is where most rock, pop and blues players spend most of our lives.

There's no doubt the Roadster is an absolutely stunning amp, but having seen the kind of valve amps coming out of China for way under a grand – even though the quality is not up to this – Mesa's UK pricing is always going to be a thorny issue, compounded by the fact that they are more affordable in the States. As a result, unless you're earning good money from playing, the Roadster won't interest you, and nor should it. This is a professional, working amplifier that'll suit anyone in two or three bands of varying styles, and who can genuinely identify the tonal and versatility shortcomings of their current noise box. If you just need one or two basic sounds, the Roadster is overkill. For anything more than that, it's just plain killer: easily among the very best do-it-all amps we've played to date. **GB**

GBOPINION

MESA DUAL RECTIFIER ROADSTER 2X12

GOLD STARS

- ★ Extremely versatile
- ★ World-class tone
- ★ Fab design and build

BLACK MARKS

- So heavy it hurts
- Expensive

IDEAL FOR...

Pros and semi-pros wanting immense valve tone and volume, plus enormous versatility without compromise

advantage of the copious bottom end, yet still keep it well defined.

Speaking personally, I could live my whole playing life in channels 1 and 2 alone. From the sparkling cleans with great presence of channel 1, through the darker, fatter Fender Tweed tones there's lots of gain if you want it, but more importantly, the kind of dynamic response to draw the best from your fingers, especially when you experiment with the wattage settings and rectifier types. Channel 2's Brit mode is the most radical departure from the general response so far, where the bottom end loses its depth and width for a much more focused, upfront midrange cut. Partnered with channel 1, that's a whole heap of classic Fender and Marshall-type tones, but very definitely Boogie'd, so to speak: fatter, fuller, more precise, and with more gain if you want it.

Heading into channels 3 and 4, this is closer to what many modern players think of Mesa territory. The 'raw' mode of channel 3 offers a lovely classic rock voice which gives plenty of definition to articulate, single-note passages, retaining enough cut to get you heard. It's a similar story in

channel 4, but with more gain. The 'vintage' and 'modern' modes are all about modern rock and metal tone with a phenomenal amount of cascading gain on tap. With so much clip, there can be a perceived drop in volume, so being able to use the full 100 watts and the diode rectifier becomes all-important now. From scoopy metal fizz, you can dial in progressively more aggressive mid range, for the kind of grinding chunk, cut and bite so beloved of the modern metal lot. Powerful humbuckers are the order of the day to keep it all in line, but keep on top of it, and you'll have every guitar player in the audience wondering where your extra speakers are: it's a massive spread from such a 'small' box.

There's little doubt that the Roadster – even with its master volume configuration – sounds better when the power amp is belting. That means volume, and absolutely loads of it: lovely. The in-built variac works well to soften some of the hard delivery in quieter playing situations – small gigs or in the studio, perhaps – but we'd say that it's at its best with everything wide open.

GBRATINGS

MESA DUAL RECTIFIER ROADSTER 2X12

