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TESTING 1...2...3...

THE GEAR IN REVIEW

BLACK MAGIC

Mesa/Boogie F-100 head and 2x12 cabinet

By Eric Kirkland

Mesa/boogie amps are famous for their endless array of tone-switching options and complex, feature-laden panels. Points in case are the unmatched Mark IV and Road King amplifiers. And while Mesa amps have always focused on delivering great tone, the superhero design team of Randall Smith and Doug West is now beginning to simplify the amps' controls and offer a more traditional taper to the EQ sections, allowing users to access the amplifiers' full sonic potential in mere seconds. Following the highly successful Studio and Dual Caliber series amps of the Eighties and Nineties, the new F-100 head delivers exceedingly rich tone and easy control, at a price that can't be beat.

When I opened the tightly packed box containing my review F-100, I was greeted by the familiar "new car" smell that seems to accompany every Mesa I've encountered, assuring

me of reliable performance and stellar tones. The amp's classic "witch's cauldron" styling includes black Taurus faux cowhide vinyl, a heavy black grille cloth and a midnight-black faceplate. The thick, stitched black leather handle looks tough and effortlessly manages the amp's weight. Four rigorously tested 6L6s generate 100 watts of chest-caving power, while four 12AX7s endow the preamp with analog warmth.

The F-100's layout may be the simplest configuration that Mesa has featured on a channel-switching amp: each of its two channels has independent old-style radio knobs for gain, treble, mid, bass, reverb and master. Although not marked on the control panel, the clean channel's gain knob is mounted on a push/pull pot; pulling out the pot imbues the channel with brighter tone and faster response time.

The F-100's front-side mini-switch lets users choose between the clean tones of channel 1 and the two high-gain distortion modes of channel 2, while a heavy toggle switch allows selection of 60 or 100 watts of headroom. Bright, faceted indicator LEDs let players see the amp's channel status from any stage angle. Also featured on the front panel are industrial-strength power/standby

switches, a large red pilot jewel, the recessed Mesa Engineering badge and a single instrument jack.

The simplicity continues on the back panel with three speaker jacks, a parallel effect loop with a mix control, and a balanced 1/4-inch recording/headphone output jack. The

THE FINE PRINT

MODEL	Mesa/Boogie F-100
INPUTS	Instrument
OUTPUTS	One 8-ohm and two 4-ohm speaker jacks; balanced 1/4-inch recording headphone jack
CHANNELS	Two, with three modes
CONTROLS	Independent gain, treble, mid, bass, reverb and master
EFFECTS LOOP	Parallel
PEDALBOARD	Provides control over channels, contour mode and reverb
PREAMP	Tube, four 12AX7s
POWER AMP	Tube, four 6L6s
POWER OUTPUT	Switchable between 60 and 100 watts
OTHER FEATURES	Pull bright switch on clean channel
CABINET TYPE	2x12 with semi-open back
SPEAKERS	90-watt Mesa Black Shadows



SWITCH DOCTOR: The F-100's three-button footswitch



supplied three-button foot controller lets players switch between channels, activate channel 2's contour mode and toggle the reverb on/off. The partially open-back 2x12 enclosure included with the head was loaded with the exclusive Mesa/Boogie 90-watt Black Shadow speakers, and it combined tight handling with the airy quality of a tuned and ported cabinet.

Loud and Clear

I tested the F-100 with a Fender American Standard Tele, a stock Fender '65 Relic Strat and a Terry McInturff 25th Anniversary guitar, loaded with VooDoo PAF humbuckers. I connected the head to the cab with MIT Hardwire speaker cable and used a Cardas 2X24M instru-

ment cable to provide the clearest and most complex tones.

In the rhythm channel, a medium-gain setting with 60 watts of power created definitive blackface-style fat clean, with a resilient feel that was involving and quick enough for every style. Cranking the gain here pushed the F-100 to break up with the sweet power crunch that made Keith Richards a legend. This is the closest Mesa has come to the elusive hand-wired Sixties tone.

With the bright switch activated, the clean channel took on a silverface-style presence that could raise the roof off a honky-tonk. Fed by

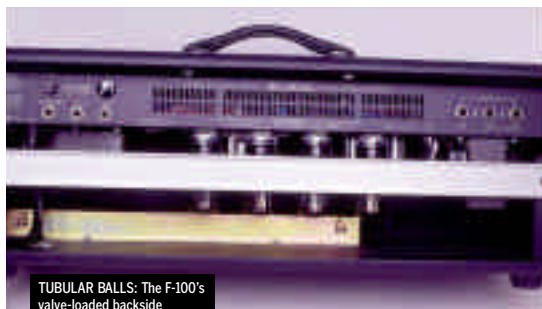
**“RICH
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my Tele's bridge-position Barden pickup, the clean channel's plunky bottom remained warm and controlled, with more snap and bite than has been produced by any previous Mesa/Boogie clean channel. The semi-open-back cabinet is probably the best choice with this channel, as it allows the amp to fill the room with sound without taking anyone's head off.

To create the layered tone that's featured on almost every great jazz album, I activated the clean channel's bright switch and reduced the tone on the McInturff guitar, using only the neck pickup. With this setup,

I achieved a dark ethereal vibe that retained excellent transients. The long tank spring reverb was the best I've heard from a Mesa; the wet effect never overwhelmed the attack but instead developed on the back half of the note envelope.

Switching to channel 2 yielded immediate high-gain satisfaction, offering long sustain, creamy overtones and impressive definition.



TUBULAR BALLS: The F-100's valve-loaded backside

And although the F-100 utilizes 6L6 tubes, its preamp injects enough upper-mid presence for stadium-size rock tones with a sugary Marshall-essence icing. With the gain and EQ controls dimed, the master on 5 and the power section set for 100 watts of tube thrust, the F-100 produced flawless neo-vintage tones with unbelievable gain à la Beck, Clapton and Santana.

Channel 2's alternate setting is the contour mode, which adds a righteous Rectifier sizzle to the mix, automatically scoops the mids and increases the drive. Players that have used a Mesa equipped with a five-bank EQ will recognize this mode's tonal shift and extra muscle. Screaming highs and a

vicious high-gain assault define this voicing and complete the F-100's journey through four decades of classic guitar tone.

The Bottom Line

Representing years of refinement and

masterful design, the Mesa/Boogie F-100 is another absolute success from a company that never seems to run out of ideas. Its three modes offer just what most players need: real black-face magic, a perfectly voiced rock channel and an ultimate high-gain setting that lets all

the Mesa's horses run wild. With intuitive controls, cinderblock-tough build quality and some of Mesa/Boogie's most responsive tones, the F-100 demonstrates that Boogie amps really do embody the spirit of art in technology. ■

KA-CHING!

LIST PRICES: F-100, \$1,099.00; 2x12 cab, \$499.00

MANUFACTURER:

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