

need it. Never muddy, honky or dark.

Bass/Deep The Deep switch is just that and it works well with all types of guitars for clean settings. Wide as it is deep. Great for jazzy hollow body tone.

EQ 1&2 Seems more like an extra clean/lead switch with mid boost. It's a Dumble thing.

Clean Gain We think a lot of rock and blues player could gleefully run the Signature without ever using the Lead channel, since the Clean channel can rock hard – it just cleans up faster.

Clean Master Master volume, but it also remains active when you're in the Lead channel, which makes for some nice contrasts and dynamic variations in touch and feel. Naturally, you crank the master and cut gain for the biggest clean tones.

Lead Gain Look out... this is where Trés Hombrés lives...

Bypass Bypasses the tone stack, but not the toggled EQ switches, although their effect is somewhat diminished. Throws down some very fat 'tweed' gain that can be intensified further in the Lead channel by adjusting the Gain control. We were able to produce pinch harmonics that turned inside out like an Octavia... Wow.

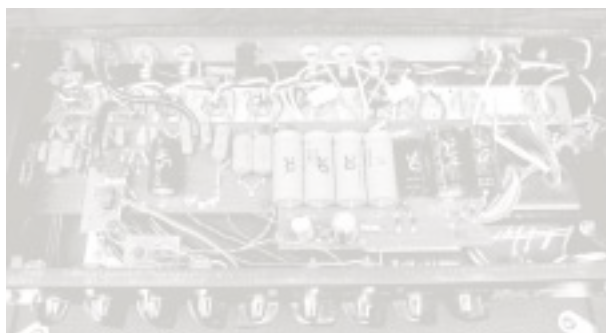
Lead Master

Reverb No other controls – none needed. Lush, warm spring reverb without the all-or-nothing taper of traditional Fender reverb.

Presence Contours hi-frequencies.

Back Panel On/Off switch, Footswitch out, 4,8 and 16 ohm speaker outs, Effects Loop Send/Return, Feedback Switch (defeats the internal feedback in the preamp section, subtly increasing highs and lows while decreasing note definition).

The Signature Custom Reverb is one of the most versatile and utterly toneful amps we have ever played, and it's hard to imagine a style of music that the Signature can't cut with



style and a voice that will have your buddies begging to plug in. Again, it will not produce the raggedy-ass beauty of a crude old Valco or Gibson from the '50s, but that's a minor compromise. What it does deliver is pristine, rich clean tones and every possible variation of subtle to completely over the top distortion, while never sounding harsh, too sharp, muddy, or artificially cranked. We couldn't find a bad tone in it, and we *tried*. One of our favorite go-to signature blues tones can be created by turning the treble up with the treble boost also

on, knocking out the bass, setting the mids at about 10 o'clock and working from the neck pickup on a humbucking or P90 guitar. Also works on a good Marshall or Fender...

We also found the Two Rock 1x12 cab to be an exceptional, and we mean exceptional tool. In fact, we're keeping this one. The Eminence speaker is efficient enough to run with a



low-powered amp, yet fully capable of handling our Marshall 50W. The cabinet sounds spectacular and takes up no more room than a Deluxe Reverb. Sold!

Sure, the Two Rock is expensive and cosmetically pedestrian — it won't win any glitzy design awards — but we like that. It's a look that wears well over time, and this is an amp that offers the potential to dramatically inspire guitarists who are ready to find a sound they can finally call their own, even if they have to unload three other amps to close the deal. **TQ**

K&M Analog Designs, www.two-rock.com
707-584-TONE (8663)

Mesa Boogie

Big Time Rock & Roll

After +30 years, you can't argue with success, and Randall Smith is one of the most successful and creative pioneers in the history of guitar amplification. His enthusiasm, passion and creativity have not diminished one bit, and they are clearly shared by everyone at Mesa Engineering. "Boogie people" are so upbeat and obviously into what they do for a living that it seems almost uncanny to have assembled so many like-minded people in one place who clearly enjoy pulling in the same direction. In that respect and many others, the pure intention of Randall Smith's amplifiers is a beautiful thing...

Our interview is followed by reviews of two amps — the reissue of the classic Mark I and the newest 1x12 model from Mesa — the Lone Star.

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TQR: After years of ignoring the hand-wired, vintage reissue 'boutique' market, companies like Fender, Vox and Marshall are now building expensive, handwired point-to-point versions of the AC30, Plexi 100W, 18W and 20W Marshalls and the '57 Twin and blackface Vibroverb. Is there another reissue of the Mark I in our future?



Great question, and a great jumping-off point for this discussion. Not only is that future already here, it's in our past and present as well!

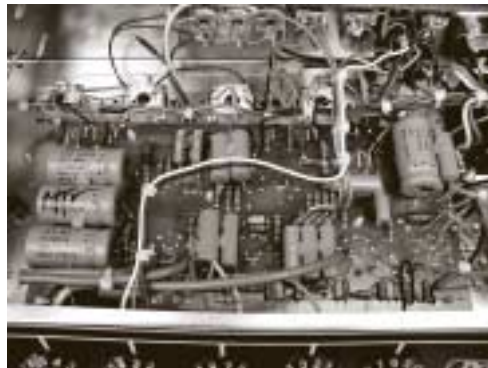
We've been offering a reissue of our Mark I for something like ten years now, so that's how the future has already come to pass. Or the past is still available in the present... And although there are similarities between the Mark I and the Lone Star, there are enough differences that we will continue into the future to offer both — at least for the present time.

You hit so many buzzwords in that one question that I think we can launch into this conversation from that single vantage point. Or should I say, *vintage point*? As far as the word 'boutique' and the mini-industry that term implies, it's often been said that the Mark I was the world's first boutique amp. That's certainly not something I was aware of at the time, though, and the fact that we still make it more than 30 years later is a testament to its musical abilities, never mind its having originated the concept of high-gain. In that respect, the Mark I is the transitional piece connecting the 'pre-gain' amps we now call vintage with the 'modern' (or 'post-vintage') amps that start with the Mark II, which was the world's first channel switching, dual mode design. And yes, the Mark I reissue is built just like the originals were, on printed circuit boards! No need for what we think is that "overly expensive and tonally inconsistent" point-to-point wiring; we only use that when it serves a demonstrable purpose, such as adding to the amp's life by making it easily serviceable. As you know, some parts on an amp wear out from use. We just had an amp in for service 23 years to the exact day after it was built. All it needed were some tubes, a couple of pots and some capacitors replaced, which was easily done, and now it's back to its original owner for more 4-night a week gigging. It made

Mike Bendinelli (our chief technician for 30 years and first employee!) and me happy to see that old warrior still going strong and we're not about to sacrifice that kind of built-in longevity and the satisfaction it gave us. Where we use point-to-point in our construction we call it "flying leads," as wires coming from the pc boards are hand soldered to the pots, some of the jacks, transformers, etc.

But there's no 'point-to-point' in our past that was abandoned for printed circuitry — just a relentless dedication to honing the craft (and artistry) of circuit-plus-circuit-board design as integral and inseparable parts of the whole amplifier. Over the years, many people have suggested we build some super expensive point-to-point, extra-custom models. We won't, because that would falsely imply one of two things: either that we think there is something better about point-to-point (we don't) or that we think our customers deserve to be charged extra for something we don't think is better, like the Emperor's New Clothes (and we don't think that either.)

Now please don't think I'm just trying to slam the point-to-point boutique industry, because p-t-p has its place. And making



small numbers of simple(r) amps is that place. Believe me, I could personally hand-wire a couple

hundred simple amps in less time than I spend on a major printed circuit board design!

But once it's done, we can offer consistent tone from amp to amp and offer more useable features at a price more players can afford, and that's the route we've chosen from the start. Bear in mind — we've always been completely unwilling to sacrifice tone for any reason, least of all economy. And just like there are no super-expensive minimalist amps we make, neither do we offer any really cheap ones either! We just can't do that. We have our standards of construction and they're the same for all models.

It's probably easier to illustrate the consistency of our approach (compared to the Biggies you mentioned) by discussing chassis design. We still form and weld up a fortress-like boxed chassis for every amp, because it's solid, reliable and of visually superior quality. Powder coat or chrome the whole thing... hand screen the label nomenclature... use threaded mounting hardware instead of wood screws into par-

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ticle board... You get the idea. Most amps built today eliminate much of the forming, all of the welding, the plating, painting and screening. That's OK for a beginner amp because it can get someone playing for cheap, but again, that's not what we do.

TQR: We love the Lone Star for what *it* can do, but it's a heavy rig. Older players working clubs seem to gravitate toward lightweight, more *portable* amps... Have you considered building a light weight 1x12 version of the Lone Star?

Another great question we seem to have anticipated. Let me lay it out this way: Aluminum costs five times as much as



steel, but aluminum is what we've used for the Lone Star chassis. The grain-oriented silicon steel we use in the transformers costs way more than the usual magnetic iron, but it sheds weight from the transformers. We still use our marine grade Baltic Birch ply in the Lone Star's cabinetry, but a thinner dimension with added shear bracing in the back and speaker baffle.

And the bottom line is that the big Lone Star weighs *less* than all its tube competitors, including the Trem Cat, Bogner Shiva or Fender Pro Verb, even though they offer 40% to 70% less power. Again, I don't mean to sound like I'm picking on them — we're happy there is enough interest in amplifiers that there's plenty of room for all of us. I merely want to point out that, despite the Lone Star's reasonable price, we've used many of the most expensive materials in order to make the weight absolutely minimal for the power and oversized cabinetry. And since those are qualities that don't show, I appreciate being allowed to point them out. If combo weight is a real issue for a player, we offer the Lone Star 1x12 in the compact cab (similar to the original Mark I dimensions) that weighs just 58 lbs. The others mentioned above are in the mid 70 pound range.

At 100 Watts, the Lone Star is a manly amplifier with enough clean headroom to play anywhere — maybe more than some players need. So, let me preview the Lone Star *Special* due out around the end of the year. Featuring four EL-84 power tubes instead of four 6L6's, the Special also weighs much



less because its transformers are smaller. Like its big brother, the Special offers channel assignable power levels (patent pending) but instead of 50 or 100 watts, the Special lets you assign 30, 15 or 5 pure Class A watts per channel. That five-watt position is especially cool because the amp switches from push-pull to single-ended operation (patent also applied for). That's a little trickier than just turning off three of the '84s.

Unlike push-pull, where even-order harmonics cancel each other and disappear in the output transformer, single-ended provides a sound rich in second harmonics — the warmest, juiciest of them all. This is an amp with incredible low-wattage nuance for individual playing or recording that can also kick up to formidable gigging power. In the push-pull 15 and 30 watt positions, the odd order harmonics tend to prevail (as always in push-pull) and these improve the amp's ability to punch and sting its way through a live mix. And by switching the impedance, a full 38 clean watts is available, although the lower power sounds aren't quite as good. This is one exciting amp and I can't wait to get my hands on the next prototype circuit boards so we can build four or five more of them before finalizing the whole design. By the way, I've been working on a technical article that tries to explain Class A, push-pull and all that technical stuff in simple language that musicians can understand. It may be on our web site by the time your readers get this issue. Just trying to write it has helped me understand these things better myself...

TQR: What was your inspiration for the Lone Star? What did you want to do differently with this amp in particular?

There were really three things that got the Lone Star started: We wanted to offer a clean sound that could serve on stage with our Rectifiers; we wanted to show our traditional customers that we hadn't abandoned our original roots since the popularity of those Rectifiers has somewhat re-cast our image as amp builders; and last, I wanted to offer an updated ver-

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sion of the Mark I — not a faithful recreation of the original as the Reissue is — but start with a clean sheet of paper and add all I've learned over 30 years. One thing those years have taught me is a growing ability

to make the complex become simpler. The Lone Star cops all the virtues of the Mark I, but it works better as a true two-channel amp. It's simpler to understand and operate, it footswitches well, and so on.

You ask what I did differently and I believe two things: one, lots of it is just evolutionary improvement, like the effects loop. Each new model seems to have a slightly better loop. They're still hard-bypassable, meaning both send and return tubes plus the controls and other elements are completely eliminated for instant comparison with the direct signal path, but each one gets a little more transparent and pure. Some things, like the channel-assignable power switching are break-through good ideas. But the other big difference from the Mark I is my pal Doug West (a.k.a. *Tone Boy and our R&D specialist for 20 years*). He wasn't around for the Mark I design, although he bought one when he was only 11 years old! We just push each other day after week after month running down the subtleties of precious tonal nuance, like the reverb. Other than the obvious, like the Bright/Warm Reverb switch, I really can't tell you why it sounds so much better in the Lone Star, other than it just got noodled to death and we got lucky. We just use our ears.

TQR: From your perspective, what trends and preferences seem to be emerging among players today? How has the market changed during the past few years and how are you serving those changing needs, specifically?"

The best thing is the guitar players themselves. I love 'em! They've given me a purpose in life and the opportunity to do something I love. That pretty much goes for all the major fellas at the shop — Jim, Doug, Steve and Tien, to name just four. We live to serve musicians and work real hard to meet (or exceed) their expectations. Since I don't play guitar myself, I don't have an ax to grind stylistically. Doug and I were laughing about the contrasts... Here we are working back to back on the 5 watt Lone Star Special and the monster Stiletto Trident — 150 watts of moshing EL-34 madness — sometimes both on the same day (Lone Star first, of course).



You couldn't get two more divergent styles or sounds, or circuits. And as I joked, who would guess they come from a guy who really wants to sound like Bill Evans

playing a great Steinway! But without Doug, it wouldn't be possible. He plays any style guitar with burning conviction, incredible patience and no ego — he's totally devoted to the tones. He and I have worked together so long that we've developed a language and a technique for developing tone and circuitry. Some days are frustrating, others rewarding, some totally inspirational. I'd say it's like most artistic undertakings.

TQR: Where is your imagination going to take us in the next few years?

Besides working on the Lone Star Special, we're just starting to build the first Stiletto Deuces. They'll be followed in a couple of months by the Tridents. These are our version of the British classics and our spin on the legendary EL-34. We're trying to deliver the classic 'Eddie' tones, among others. But the only pattern here is to keep doing what we've always been doing and that's trying to make more players happy by coming up with amplifiers dedicated to different musical styles. Each new design borrows from all the past ones, teaches us more and propels the whole thing forward by suggesting more new possibilities. We're not even close to running out of ideas or enthusiasm. We see it as serving all the different musical styles. It seems to me that most styles of playing exist simultaneously and the trends have more to do with which ones get more popular attention at any given time. The styles themselves are all equally valid as far as I'm concerned. Some can be seen to evolve, while others, like the Blues, are pretty well established as classics.

I think most people (and musicians especially), undergo a musical awakening at some point in their lives. They hear some piece of music and it really resonates with them, they really *hear* for the first time, it makes a connection and it somehow imprints into their psyche and becomes an important part of their identity. Then, throughout the rest of their lives, that particular style is likely to remain their favorite for all time, never mind if it's no longer trendy. What's so hip about guitar is the number and breadth of different styles available from one instrument. And it's largely the amplifier

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that sets apart the individual sounds and styles and makes them possible. You can play a lot of different musical styles on an acoustic piano, but the instrument always sounds the same. Compare that to electric guitar where the amplifier is at least half of the total instrument, because it's what you actually hear — not the plucked strings. Amplifiers and styles emerge and evolve hand in hand. Blues and rock sounds came from 'turning up too loud' — especially an amp like the 4x10 Bassman, which was touted for its *lack* of distortion. Ever heard anyone use one for bass? Me neither.

But we've moved on past the unexpected and unintended uses of amplification to the point where the amp is literally a serious musical instrument all by itself. Specs and 'scopes and all that don't matter one bit. You go for a sound, or *several* sounds. And there is such a great interest in guitars and amps by such a great number of people that it stays fun and exciting. As far as the future, those young guys who were imprinted by a Recto sound at an early age will be wanting to get one of their own as they grow older. The Lone Star pays tribute to the sounds that first hooked us and so many other guys, some middle age now and older, who are still interested in possessing those classic sounds that first seduced them. This is the Tone Quest.

TQR: We've read the usual lore about the development of the original Mark I — that you "guttled a Princeton Reverb and turned it into a 100W amp by hanging huge transformers on it, etc..." Lately we have even heard people speculating on which came first... the Dumble Overdrive Special or the Mark I, and is one amp derivative of the other? Can you set the record straight on your inspiration for the Mk?

Wow. Big Question. Let me try to keep the answer short. The first Princeton Boogies were hot-rodged 4x10 Bassman and Twin type amps built to look totally stock inside the Princeton cabs, including a 12-inch JBL or Altec speaker. Santana's was probably the most famous of the hundred plus I made, although the first was for Barry Melton (of Country Joe and the Fish) and it was built as a practical joke! Even with the increase in power and gain, Carlos still asked for an



amp that would sustain a note even better and longer. He hated it when he tried to hold a note and it died out. As he said, in some halls, some nights some notes would sustain but what a drag when they didn't.

Around this time I was asked by Lee Michaels if I could come up with a musical sounding pre-amp for his new Crown DC-300 power amps. Lee was always a dreamer and a wild man — always exploring wacky new projects. Matter of fact, he had just built a go kart you laid down in with two chain saw motors strapped to a solid rear axle right between your ears. He took it out to Sears Point (our Sonoma road race track now more famous for NASCAR) and passed a Ferrari that had just won at Daytona! When his record company heard about that, their insurance forbade him from ever driving it again! Anyway, he told me how all these other companies he listed had made pre-amps for the Crowns that just couldn't drive it right. Luckily, I wasn't hampered by knowing anything about the specs or having any formal engineering, so I started with a trusty Fender-based pre-amp but added another tube for an additional gain stage because I didn't know what it took to drive the Crown. Then, to hedge my bets and make this pre-amp controllable, I put in three gain controls at various points along the circuit.

When I finally took the thing over to Lee's big home studio, he accidentally plugged the preamp output right into this 4x12 cab. Well, we kept turning it up and up because we could hear a little faint sound — but no more. With my tail severely between my legs, I started to unplug it and head for home when I noticed it wasn't plugged in right. I switched the cords around, got it right, and asked Lee to hit a chord. Now picture the two of our bodies being blown across the studio floor and right into the back wall! We still had the pre-amp jacked waaaay up and when all that signal hit the 600 watt Crown, it was like an explosion! But the amazing thing was, it had TONE! We got to adjusting those three gain controls and found there were amazing things you could do by altering the settings. You could go from the loudest, cleanest Fender sound ever heard into these new realms of overdrive performance that were never heard before. Single notes could be made to sustain forever, even at soft volumes, and power chords were just ridiculous. Lee wasn't a great guitarist — remember, he was really a keyboard guy, but he played with a great rock and roll attitude and that amp delivered the shit in spades!

That, I believe, was the birth of high-gain. Here's what I mean: You can take a typical Fender-style preamp and hot rod it, increasing the gain among other things. But while you can get a 50% or 100% increase in gain, that's about all that configuration can support, and meanwhile, you're compromising the original tonal characteristics to get that additional gain. With this new circuit, you could retain the original character-

istics and instead of one hundred percent more gain, you could dial up almost one hundred *times* more gain. And that was the key to this new realm of sonic performance. Balancing those three controls shifted the emphasis on various parts of the circuit and provided gain and saturation in any amount, anywhere you wanted, and could do so independent of playing loudness.

The next day I realized that this kind of circuit should solve Santana's problem with sustain, so I built one up in a Princeton-sized 1x12 combo package with four 6L6's and covered it with Snakeskin. It still had the Level control, which was the final output and all of the gain stages were on



line all the time. Later, to make it easier to operate and understand, I put the last stage first with two tricky switching jacks so a player could access either a pretty traditional Fender preamp or, by plugging into Input 1, get the added performance of that first Gain stage. That became the Mark I. I still remember the moment that solution popped into my mind: my hair stood on end and I had a little shiver. I still live for those break-through moments when something clicks in your brain. It's like a mini orgasm of the visionary type and suddenly you see something in a new and different way.

As far as Dumble, I don't know much. I've never been inside of one of his amps, although I hear they're all gooped up to prevent copying and that they are built on printed circuit boards. I did run across a hand-drawn block diagram somewhere — I don't know — Gerald Weber's book or Aspen's — of an Overdrive Special and it looked to me like the functional equivalent of a Mark II. The configuration was the same, deriving the overdrive the same way, had the controls and internal switches in the same locations and so on. Howard no doubt has his own ways of doing things and makes great amps, so many of the parts values and such could be different, or the whole thing could be different for all I know. Really, my only exposure to his amps is that one block diagram, although I did meet him briefly in 1973 or '74 when we were both trying to straighten out Neil Young's stage rig of six tweed Fenders all turned to ten which picked up horrendous buzzing from the light dimmers. Howard said he had a solution, but he wouldn't show Neil until he was

paid \$1000 up front. He had this huge resistor box — I mean there were a couple of wire-wound ceramic resistors about two feet long. I was pretty intimidated and I wanted to see what it would do, but Neil wouldn't pay first and Howard wouldn't try it without first getting paid. After he left, I was up next. I tried putting some ground-lift plug adaptors like you get at the hardware store on five of Neil's six amps and disconnected all but one of the ground switches. That seemed to cure the buzz. Then one night when I was sound asleep, Neil's road manager, an ex-Green Beret named Leo Makota, called and told me to pack my tools and drive to SF airport where they had a first class ticket for a red-eye to Chicago, then on to Madison. When I started to protest, he said firmly, "You WILL be there. I'm hanging up now." At dawn on a snowy morning, bleary eyed in Madison, a chauffeur in uniform snatched my tool box off the luggage conveyor just as I started to reach for it, then led me toward a block long limo parked in front. As we approached, the rear door swung open and when I got there, Leo held out this huge buck knife with a giant line of coke running its entire length. "Here," he said. "You're going to need this!" That was the *Harvest* Tour and baby, it was big time rock and roll! **To**

www.mesaboogie.com, 707-778-6565

Review - *The Mark I Reissue & Lone Star*

Thanks to Steve Mueller at Mesa Engineering, we've been working out with two great amps. We'll begin appropriately with the model that started it all, the Mark I.



A lot of time has passed since Carlos Santana's original Boogie was heard on *Abraxas*. Mesa subsequently issued an entire series of 'Mark'

amps, including the Mark IIA, IIB, IIC, IIC+, the S.O.B. (son of Boogie – the first 'reissue'), Mark III and Mark IV. The current reissue Mark I is indeed a true reissue of the original amps, and after all this time it still rocks with an inspiring range of harmonically heavy tones, clean power, distortion, sustain, dynamic attack and attitude. If you've ever rocked

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out during your love affair with the guitar and the Boogie Mark I doesn't send you straight into a two hour gonzo guitar freakout, consider taking up the mandolin, brother. This amp *forces* you to travel to new and interesting places, but if you have little patience for carefully dialing in and noting EQ and gain levels, you could very easily get it all wrong. Merely turning the Bass, Treble and Midrange tone controls less than a full number on the dial can dramatically change your sound, right down to the subtle overtones lurking within



those four big-ass 6L6 tubes. Switching between the 60W and 100W settings also requires the tone and gain settings to be recalibrated, and with each new guitar we plugged into the Mark I, tone settings deserved to be explored and noted for future reference. It's time well spent, because true to its reputation, this is an amp that *demand*s attention.

We alternately lit up just about every other amplifier in our music room while we played the Boogie, because doing so enabled us to better appreciate it for what it does, and comparisons are revealing... Compared to our vintage Fender Deluxe, Pro Reverb and '69 Marshall 50W, for example, the Boogie is much faster, more connected, forward, aggressive and and less forgiving. The 'clean' tones in Channel Two retain so much harmonic content that the term really must be re-defined for the Boogie, and if your taste leans toward 'old school,' The Mark I may require you to re-think the way you listen to and evaluate guitar tone. Afterall, this is the amp that originally propelled the electric guitar beyond the familiar, saturated tones of unaffected non-master Marshall amps and into relatively unexplored, high gain territory. Carlos Santana is *still* mining the brilliant overdriven tone and sustain originally launched by the Mark I, and he could play an entire show with this amp and a 1x12 in a 100-seat club or a 10,000 seat arena with a 4x12 cabinet. That's what the Boogie does, and all of our vintage amps sounded oddly slow, one dimensional and tame by comparison. We still love 'em, but the experience is not unlike driving a 40 year-old six-banger with 'three on the tree' and then sliding into a 2004 vehicle, which is all the more impressive given that the Mark I was created over 30 years ago... Perhaps the most significant observation we can offer regarding the Mark I is that it is such a liberating blast to play. The fun factor is off the charts, and its historical significance and impact on guitar amplification is undeniable.

According to Mesa Boogie, the reissue Mark I has been

changed from the original only in respect to the variable gain loop, which switches out of the circuit when FX are removed, and Tweed™ Power which "works like a built-in Variac, lowering overall voltages to produce a softer, brown vibe." The Tweed Mode really succeeds in calming this beast down as described, and while the Boogie is known for its soaring sustain and distortion, Channel Two also produces a very solid and lush clean tone. The Mark I is one of the most responsive amps we've played recently, and the frosting on the cake is that the Boogie is a very sharp dressed, compact amp... "Oooo, honey! Tell me how you make such a big noise outta that little bitty thing?" Uh, huh. You could run with that... The Mark I is available as a 1x12 combo or head with your choice of cabinet configuration, and true to form, the build quality and cosmetics are flawless.

In contrast to the Mark I, the 1x12 Lone Star succeeds in bridging classic Fender and modern Marshall tones with an array of features that have become the hallmark of Mesa Engineering. The Lone Star is more refined and restrained, warmer and more sophisticated than the Mark I, and there are



plenty of tones, feels and moods to explore in both channels, but no where will you stumble into the white hot, midrange-laden brain smack found in Mesa's Rectifier amps, and you won't see a Lone Star at OzzFest.

For starters, the Lone Star's Channel One really does a brilliant, classic clean tone with the amp set at 60W that Jeff Bakos described as sounding like a blackface Super Reverb. We agreed, and you can throw in a blackface Twin at the 100W setting, too. But the Lone Star also takes these classic



tones beyond their origins, with a richer, more complex sound that reveals the harmonic

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detail of every note in a style the old Fenders can't. The tones are seductively habit-forming, and this is an amp that will undoubtedly find it's way into many well-equipped studios. The larger cabinet adds warmth, depth and dimensionality over the smaller Mark I cabinet, and both channels can be operated with your choice of a 5UR4 tube rectifier for a less responsive, slower vintage feel, or the tougher, faster sound of a silicon diode. They both have their place. A front mounted toggle switch also renders a very authentic, organic 'tweed' tone (identical to the tweed circuit on the Mark I) or an opened up, 'blackface' feel that is more immediate and hi-fi.



Channel Two can be accessed via a mini-toggle or the footswitch, and this is where the Lone Star struts its Mark I DNA. A

separate Drive control is dedicated to Channel Two that can be mixed with the Master Volume and Gain controls to ratchet up distortion and sustain, but again, this is a smoother if no less colorful flavor of crunch than we found in the Mark I. Another mini-toggle dedicated to Channel Two delivers 'thick' or 'thicker' tone that sounded like a low-midrange boost with a subtle change in dynamic feel and gain, but it doesn't cause the the bottom to fall apart in either setting. This is a very handy feature when moving from weaker single coils to humbucking pickups when you want to add variable heaviness and attitude. The proprietary Celestion 'C90' speaker found in both of our review amps delivered rock-solid low end, excellent midrange punch and very smooth, musical highs, and it handled full power without producing 'cone cry' or significant distortion.

Tone controls are straight up — treble, midrange, bass and presence, and you'll have to commit the function of all the control pots to memory because you won't be able to read them unless you're sitting on the floor in front of the amp. Yes, that's a minor complaint, but we dealt with it after some initial fumbling.

Rear controls include the tube rectifier/diode toggle, fan on/off, hard effects loop bypass, a bias switch for running 6L6's or EL34's, separate reverb level pots for channel one and two, and a reverb bright/normal toggle. The Lone Star also has three speaker outs (4/4 & 8 ohms), effects send and return jacks and level out, a slave out with line out control and two external switching jacks for remote channel switching and solo control switching for the Lead Channel.

The ultimate test of any new review amp for us is this: Will we miss it when it's gone? The Mark I and the Lone Star encouraged us to discover unique tones, textures and musical themes that we wouldn't have found otherwise, and yes, they certainly will be missed. The Mark I is what it is — bold, toneful, raucous, and capable of incredible volume in a small package. The Lone Star seems destined to become a flagship amplifier that will appeal to a very diverse group of players with sophisticated tastes who also place a high priority on versatility live and in the studio.

So the beat goes on... It's 2004 and we have more truly cool *and* worthy instruments available to us than in any time in the history of the guitar, and *especially* in regard to amplifiers. Things you know and love are good. Unfamiliar things that challenge you are good, too. We can't even begin to tell you what you should be playing — it's simply not for us to say, although plenty of people are doing that right now on discussion pages, beating the details into something needlessly complicated and ultimately useless. In putting this issue together, we have been reminded of something vitally important that we hope you will continue to consider... We all have a voice, it's ours alone, and all of this gear simply offers us the potential to experience and express a rainbow of colors, moods and emotions through our instruments. Yet, there is still no 'best' that can be universally and subjectively applied to gear for every player. As John Mayer described his personal quest for tone — sometimes even the things we think sound good can lose their appeal over time. We're all looking for things that can last and anchor our lives with permanency; our purpose is to direct you to things that are worthy of your time and money. Fortunately, it seems that we very often agree on what that may be.

So as you continue to chase the Mighty Fine Note, take care to feel who you are in everything you do. Leave your mark. Touch others with grace. When in doubt, just bother to show up, because many simply don't, and as always, Quest Forth... When it sounds good to you, nothing else matters. **To**



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