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THE
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FENDER '57 TWIN
AMP/'57 DELUXE,
LINE 6 POD XT LIVE

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\$4.95 U.S./\$6.95 Canada

"Strat"ospheric Sounds

Red Iron Amps

ASONE PER USES THE amplifiers made by Paul Sanchez, of the Texas-based Red Iron Amps, many thoughts enter one's noodle; thoughts of beauty, rugged coolness, or maybe just plain old "what the heck are those" wonderment.

Sanchez is a musician who has played with some heavyweights in the Austin scene. He got into electronics more than 15 years ago when he became an amp tech for another local amp maker, and after cutting his proverbial teeth, struck out on his own in 2001.

Today, he is the proprietor and sole builder at Red Iron Amps, which gets its name from the heavy-duty iron Sanchez uses to make his chassis, which he says is particularly rigid and conductive. His cabinets are made of mesquite, which resembles cherry but has a more irregular grain. And if you think the top, bottom, and sides are rustic, check out the faceplates, which give each amp its own visual identity.

Sanchez's unique approach to building extends to model names – or more accurately, the lack thereof. He rationalizes this approach,

which obviously poses its challenges in terms of promotion/marketing, by saying he doesn't see his amps as finished products. Rather, he considers them starting points for concepts that evolve over months and years.

Sanchez's 18-watt Marshall-influenced amp uses a choke in the power supply, two 12AX7 preamp tubes, a 6CA4 rectifier, two EL84s, and a Heyboer/Radio Spares output transformer. Its controls consist of just two knobs – one for Volume and one for Tone, and the back panel is equally spartan, housing only a fuse holder and one output.

Sanchez calls the second amp the "Milspec 50," which hints at its output (50 watts) and the fact it uses NOS military-spec output and choke transformers. Its tube complement consists of a 6SN7, a 6SL7 preamp, GE 5V4GB rectifier, and a set of matched 6L6GC output tubes. Controls are Volume, Bass, and Treble. On the rear panel is an impedance selector, cathode bias control, a fuse holder, and an output jack. Both have switches

for on/off and standby, with blue indicator. A peek inside reveals true point-to-point wiring with no tag or fiber boards – just short wires running from the tube sockets at perpendicular angles.

In terms of internal parts and build quality, these amps are sturdy as tanks. To what degree they'd be roadworthy, however, would require careful consideration of just how much beating you'd expect their gorgeous cabinets to take.

To give the Red Irons a run, we plugged them into a Celestion-loaded 2x12" cab with an open back. Our guitars were a stock '70s Fender Strat and a Yamaha SA500 semi-hollow with humbuckers.

The 1970s Strat into the 18-watter set to semi clean (Volume at 10:30, Tone at 2 o'clock), initially produces a very warm, full, tone with nice note separation, tight low-end response, and that sweet high-end response made famous by the EL84. The amp covers the whole range of frequencies very well, with nice balance, and as we dialed up the Volume, the EL84s rewarded us with crunch with nice clarity. Diming the Volume knob revealed the amp's true strength, as it offered a very detailed "British gain" with great sustain and continued note separation. The tone is beautifully complex, with tight lows, clear mids, and super-smooth high-end response and gain. And touch response is particularly impressive.



RED IRON AMPLIFIERS

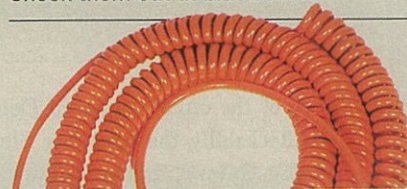
Price: \$1,200 18-watter
(BACK) \$1,500 Milspec 50
Contact: Red Iron Amps/Paul Sanchez, 213 S. Rio Grande, Lockhart, TX 78644.

GEARIN' UP



BLUETRON BLUEVERB

The Bluetron Blueverb uses hand-wired construction, has separate controls for each gain stage, five voicings, five output transformers, four output-tube types, four color schemes and various cabinet configurations. Check them out at bluetron.com.



LAVA CABLE RETRO-COIL

Lava Cable's 25-foot Retro-Coil cable uses annealed low-strand-count copper conductors, G&H Ultra-Clear plugs, with options including straight or right-angle ends. It carries a lifetime warranty. Go to lavacable.com.



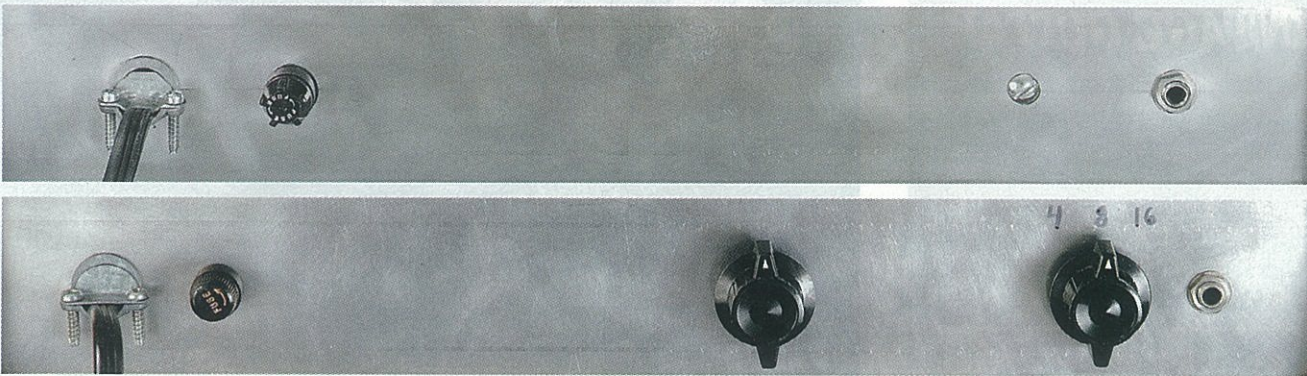
VOX AC15HTVH

Vox's AC15HTVH amp uses an EF86 pentode valve to create sound in two channels. Its Celestion Alnico Blue 12" speaker is housed in a matching speaker cab, and its tone is created by three ECC83/12AX7 preamp tubes, two EL84s, and an EZ81 rectifier. Other controls include Treble and Bass controls for the Top Boost channel, and Top Cut. Learn more at voxamps.co.uk.



YAMAHA SBG2000/SBG1000

Yamaha's SBG2000 and SBG1000 have carved maple tops over mahogany bodies, 22-fret ebony fretboards over a mahogany necks and adjustable tune-o-matic-style bridges with stop tail pieces. Electronics include two Alnico humbucking pickups, a three-position toggle



Red Iron Amps 18-watter (TOP), Milspec 50 (BOTTOM).

Plugging in with the Yamaha produced the expected darker overall tone, but it still sparkled and retained the smooth gain and tight low-end.

The Strat running into the Milspec 50 with the Volume at 12 o'clock produced a rich, dark tone that retained a hint of sparkle, but was much more about its huge, tight low-end response. All fine and good. But as we pushed the Volume to 3 o'clock, the amp simply blossomed,

producing a sparkle from a Strat unlike anything else. Even with the open-back cabinet, low-end was incredible and midrange tones were incredibly fat.

Pushing the volume further produced more sparkle and gain, but never *too* much. If your game includes heavy saturation, you'll want a good drive pedal in front of this amp, but its overtones are, nonetheless, incredibly complex, with unbeatable touch response.

With the semi-hollow/humbucker-ered Yamaha, we rolled off the guitar's bass to get a lush bluesy tone, especially with the neck-position pickup. The cathode-bias adjuster can be very helpful in obtaining optimum tone, which was perhaps more apparent with this guitar than the Strat, which needed no back-panel tweaking in order to sound fantastic.

— Bob Tekippe

Rig in a Box

The Line 6 PODxt Live

MULTI-EFFECTS PROCESSORS scare many guitarists; too many buttons, blinking lights, menus, and digital gobbledegook for simple tastes.

Fortunately, Line 6 knows this, and continues to design guitar electronics just for techno-phobic guitarists. Their latest innovation, the PODxt Live, is not only easy to use, but it's a joy to work with, as its interface is as friendly as possible... at least for guitar pickers.

Like many processors, the PODxt Live has plenty of brand-name effects types, all under one roof. Add to that a world of Line 6's famed amp emulations. And of course, there are piles of speaker-cabinet emulations of all sorts — 1x12, 2x12, 4x10, 4x12, etc. You can also choose what kind of output you want, as you plug the PODxt Live into a power amp and cabinet, straight into a PA, or use a digital output.

By now, you may be rolling your eyes, thinking, "Oh lord, not another techy piece of gear that will require hours to program." While you can tweak the many effects here "the old-fashioned way," the far better way is to do it on your computer screen. Yup, with a USB cable, you plug the PODxt Live into your PC or Mac, and use the very simple GearBox software program to adjust all effects onscreen. When you dial in a few sounds you like, you can save 'em, store 'em, and use them for recording. Or, unplug the USB, take the unit to a gig, and rock away on your own patches.

For some, the PODxt

Live can be a revelation. Installed as the guitar front-end in a studio, it can replace multi-unit preamp setups. And with its computer-based editing, the unit serves most needs. When recording, the ability to open the GearBox software and pick amps, speakers, and effects on the fly makes the process way more efficient. As for sound quality, the vast majority of people listening to the tracks won't know the track was recorded this way instead of with a traditional mic'd amp. Granted, this isn't the same sonic "beef" as a good tube amp, but that's a nuance — Line 6's emulations are generally very good and, in fact, you probably hear them every time you turn on the radio, since many producers have used Pods for years.

Another cool feature is that you can download new Pod patches from other users right off of Line 6's website. Just click on the download and within a few sec-

GEARIN' UP

switch, and two volume, two-tone pots with push/push coil taps. The SBG2000 uses neck-through construction while the SBG1000 has a set neck. Read more at yamahaguitars.com.



MAXON OD-9 PRO+ OVERDRIVE

Maxon's OD-9 Pro+ Overdrive uses the original OD-9 Circuit, with 9- or 18-volt operation, switchable +3 dB midrange boost, and mechanical true-bypass switching. Read more at godlyke.com.



TOKAI SC-2C

Tokai's SC-2C has an African mahogany body, a carved top with a wood cap, set African mahogany neck, rosewood fingerboard, Tone Pros AVR-II bridge, Kluson System II machine heads, and Keiyo humbucking pickups. Learn more at godlyke.com.

DUNLOP JIMI HENDRIX WAH

The Dunlop Jimi Hendrix Signature Wah has the classic look, with a chrome top and black crinkle-finish aluminum body. Learn more at jimdunlop.com.

onds, the new sound is ready to go in GearBox, where you can save it, tweak it, or delete it. The access to endless new sounds is nothing short of miraculous compared to the days when you had an MXR Phase 90 that made five sounds.

The PODxt Live gives you 1,000 guitar sounds, and many of them are excellent.

But wait... there's more! If you want to take it to the next level, the PODxt Live also has a Variax digital input to accommodate Line 6's line of Variax guitar, which make a variety of electric, acoustic, and specialty guitar sounds, but the cool thing is the dedicated jack.

In addition to sending audio to the POD, the cable provides AC power to the Variax guitars, which is one less cord you have to deal with. Second, the PODxt has a number of custom-made presets for the Variax. For

LINE 6 PODXT LIVE

Price: \$599.99

Contact: Line6, Inc, 29901 Agoura Road, Agoura Hills CA 91301-2513; www.line6.com

