

# Kustom High Voltage HV100 2 x 12 combo £399

A new hybrid design from Kustom promises high voltage rock 'n' roll, but does it deliver?  
by Chris Vinnicombe

PHOTOGRAPHY: JESSE WILD

**K**ustom is an amplifier brand that goes back over four decades. In recent years the emphasis has been largely on entry-level backline equipment, and the new High Voltage series amplifiers are no exception. Alongside smaller 30- and 65-watt configurations (see spec check), the HV100 is the daddy of the new range; a hefty twin-channel 2 x 12 combo with built-in effects and hybrid circuitry that utilises an ECC83 preamp valve – subject to high voltages – for all things drive-related.

While the HV100 doesn't have the iconic visual clout of a Fender Blackface 2 x 12, it's a smart enough looking beast, with the black vinyl covering and speaker cloth offset by white piping and guitar-style chrome

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knobs. The aforementioned knobs have a smooth action and are situated on a panel that sits at the rear of the amplifier, Fender Tweed or Vox-style, only with the control panel legends helpfully facing us as we stand in front of the amp. The HV100 weighs in at a modest 23kg, and we couldn't help but notice a pair of nifty retractable feet that you can unscrew from the cabinet's undercarriage and lock into position, providing the kind of tilted back set-up

that makes monitoring your onstage guitar sound so much easier.

Other hidden delights include a septet of inputs and outputs around the back to enhance the HV100's usefulness in a variety of scenarios. A speaker-emulated XLR direct out and a quarter-inch jack input for hooking up a CD or other digital audio player are accompanied by an external speaker output, effects send and return, and two connections for footswitches. Although the £399 tag doesn't find one included, the main KCF301 footswitch is a three-button affair that activates channel switching, effects defeat and rhythm channel overdrive. Usefully, plugging in a generic latching unit will still allow you to switch channels. Connection of a single-button



KUSTOM HV100	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★
<p>■ <b>WE LIKED</b> Plenty of volume and headroom; Celestion drivers</p> <p>■ <b>WE DISLIKED</b> Noisy effects and lead channel; footswitch not included</p>	

momentary footswitch to the external tap socket allows real-time control of effects parameters. Another useful feature is that when you switch to another effect, the most recent tap setting for the previously used selection is stored automatically.

An effects level control dictates the wet/dry signal balance of the 16 digital effects. For the most part, you can

select one modulation, delay or reverb effect at any given time, but there are several combination settings that allow you to include room reverb alongside rotary speaker simulation, tremolo, delay or chorus. That said, before you even think about augmenting your basic sound with effects there are numerous options on the front panel that allow for detailed tone-shaping. On the rhythm side, aside from a three-band EQ and gain and volume controls, there is a fat/lean switch and an overdrive mode. Selecting the fat setting overdrives the input stage of the ECC83 preamp valve, while overdrive mode boosts the second valve gain stage, giving you a (footswitchable) crunch sound between your rhythm and lead settings.

On the lead side of the equation, the gain boost switch is fairly self-explanatory, and the grind/punch switch toggles a pair of preamp voicings with contrasting EQ curves. Controlling

the level of the whole thing is an overall master volume, somewhat confusingly labelled 'boost'.

**SOUNDS:** As you'd expect from an amplifier of this nature, a huge clean sound is readily available with no shortage of headroom. The switching options in combination with the gain control allow you to introduce a raspy crunch to proceedings, and should you wish to adorn your sound with one of the effects on offer there is plenty of choice. And while there's only limited flexibility due to the control system, the basic voicings of the effects are of a decent standard. However, in a studio situation, it's painfully apparent that the effects section is prone to extraneous noise; the reverbs in particular are blighted by a considerable hiss that is difficult to eradicate with a noise gate. This isn't such an issue in a live band situation, but we did find ourselves wanting to

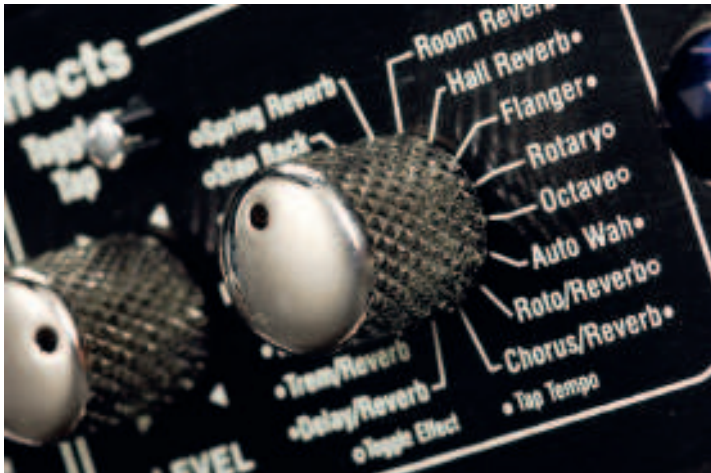
## The rivals

Vox AD100VT £369  
 Line 6 Spider III 15 £386  
 Marshall AVT275X £455

Two of these amplifiers are high-powered 2 x 12 combos that utilise an ECC83 preamp valve in their circuits, albeit in different ways. The Vox uses the tube as part of a Valve Reactor circuit to help generate a range of genuinely convincing amp sounds derived from a library of classics. Marshall's AVT combo couples two digital effects sections to a hybrid design and seems to be a popular choice on the pub gig circuit. Finally, we checked out the ace new Spider III last month and gave it a full workout on the CD.

KUSTOM HIGH VOLTAGE HV100 2 x 12 COMBO £399

GUITAR AMPS CD TRACKS 2 & 3/GUITARIST INTERACTIVE



**KUSTOM HIGH VOLTAGE HV100**

**PRICE:** £399  
**ORIGIN:** China  
**TYPE:** Hybrid 2 x 12 guitar combo  
**OUTPUT:** 100 watts  
**VALVES:** One 12AX7/ECC83 preamp valve  
**CABINET:** Particle board  
**SPEAKERS:** Two Celestion G12-P 80 12-inch drivers  
**DIMENSIONS:** 500 (h) x 665 (w) x 300mm (d)  
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 23/51  
**CHANNELS:** Lead and rhythm  
**CONTROLS:** Lead channel: gain, volume, bass, middle and treble, switches for gain boost and grind/punch voicing. Rhythm channel: gain, volume, bass, middle and treble, switches for fat/lean voicing and overdrive. Master volume. Effects: switches for effects active, toggle tap, level pot, 16-position rotary selector  
**FEATURES:** 16 onboard effect selections: room, spring and hall reverbs, flanger, rotary speaker simulation, octave, auto wah, slap back, chorus, delay, phaser, tremolo, rotary/reverb, chorus/reverb, tremolo/reverb, delay/reverb. Toggle tap button adjusts either effect rate for time-based effects or toggles between voicing variations  
**CONNECTIONS:** Instrument input, external speaker out, speaker emulated XLR out, effects send and return, CD/tape input, main and ext tap footswitch inputs  
**FOOTSWITCH:** KCF301 (£39.99) not included  
**RANGE OPTIONS:** The 1 x 12 HV65 (£339) and 1 x 10 HV30 (£269)  
**JHS**  
**01132 865 381**  
**www.jhs.co.uk**



The Celestions add muscle to the overdrive

→ revert to pedals for our effects kicks. The presence of an ECC83 preamp valve in the circuit, along with a pair of Celestion speakers, helps the amplifier's abrasive overdrive bark away with authority. It's not the most subtle or defined high-gain sound, but it's more than muscular enough to do the business and there's certainly no shortage of volume. The grind and punch voicings have contrasting mid-range emphases, so if you are using this amp in a twin guitar situation we'd recommend trying both to see what fits best in a band mix. Again, even with a guitar fitted with well-behaved humbuckers, we had some noise issues with the lead channel, so bear this in mind when heading into the studio.

**Verdict**

Other than the onboard digital effects section, the HV100's basic sounds don't seem to exhibit much evidence of significant evolution beyond the swathes of 'first gigging amp' hybrid circuits that were commonplace throughout the 1990s. While we have legitimate concerns about the noise emissions of the aforementioned effects and the overdrive channel, other than that there's really nothing particularly amiss about this combo's performance; it's just that these days a shade under £400 can buy you a feature-packed modelling amp or even an all-valve combo, and with that in mind the HV100 has some very hot competition indeed. **B**

**Kustom HV100**

**Guitarist RATING** ★★★★★



**Kustom 12-Gauge 1 x 12 combo £99**

**A straight-ahead practice amp that delivers for less than a ton**

Another of Kustom's new models is the 12-Gauge, a 10-watt practice combo that features a specially designed 12-inch speaker to deliver a much bigger tone with a firmer bottom end than similarly sized and priced amplifiers. Other features include lead and rhythm channels with a shared three-band EQ, external speaker output, headphone output, CD/tape input, delay and reverb. In addition, a plywood baffle is included with enhancement of cabinet resonance being the chief aim. The rest of the cabinet is made from particleboard, but the fixtures and fittings are more than robust enough for the job at this price point.

**SOUNDS:** Winding up the volume on the clean channel it's clear that the choice of 12-inch speaker pays dividends when it comes to bottom-end response compared to that of similarly priced solid-

state practice amps. Higher frequencies also benefit from the detail and dynamic response of a larger driver. Because of the shared EQ, it's something of a balancing act when it comes to setting up a dirty sound as the lead channel is a little low-end light compared to the clean channel set flat. Reigning in the gain and keeping it below two thirds yields plenty of drive but stops things getting too fizzy or unacceptably noisy. The built-in delay is limited in scope but sounds decent enough, although we must admit to being a little mystified by the 'reverb' setting; it's more like a slap-back echo. Check out the sound clip on Guitarist Interactive to see what we mean.

**Verdict**

Despite the popularity of all things modelling, some players are just after a no-frills practice amplifier with nothing fancier than decent clean and dirty sounds, so if you are turned off by banks of buttons and lights, the 12-Gauge might be just what you are looking for.

**Guitarist RATING** ★★★★★