



## Engl InVader 150 head £1,899

Engl's new amp features a six-pack of EL34s for a knock-out punch and then some. Scary monster or super head? *by Nick Guppy*

It's been a while since we last saw a new Engl amp but that doesn't mean things have gone quiet for the company, far from it in fact as this newest head demonstrates. Boasting no less than six EL34 output valves, the InVader 150 is guaranteed to raise more than the odd eyebrow and, used to excess, it will probably do a good job of testing buildings for structural integrity too. Designer Horst Langer is known for getting the most out of his amps in terms of tone and features, so how does the InVader 150 stack up

against the rest of Engl's range? Let's take a closer look.

Engl's house style is a mix of vintage and hi-tech modern, into which the InVader fits nicely. A large, neatly finished plywood sleeve surrounds the tough steel chassis, with a front grille consisting of horizontal black chrome tubes through which you can see the valves, illuminated by a row of blue LEDs when the power is switched on. As well as those six big output bottles, the InVader 150 also sports two massive transformers leaving no doubt

that this isn't an amp for those with weak hearts. Internally, the electronics are entirely mounted on PCBs and the layout and component quality is typical of Langer's exceptionally high standard, including a clever protection circuit that prevents damage if a speaker lead isn't plugged in – it also shuts the power amp off in the event of a valve failure and can even tell you which valve is defective. There's also a handy ground lift switch on the rear panel, which can be used to remove the hum caused by ground loops, although

The depth punch function can fine-tune the power amp's high and low frequency response



## This amp doesn't take prisoners, and while it sounds good at typical small to medium-sized rock gig volume levels it's really intended for stadiums

gain boost function and bright tone shaping for channels 1 and 2, with four more for channel selection, while another quartet of buttons adjacent to the standby switch select the InVader's dual master volumes, noise gate, effects loops and memory functions. All these switching options are programmable and easily stored for each channel.

On the rear panel you'll find a pair of MIDI in and thru sockets, along with two more jacks for use with alternative footswitches like Engl's Z-9 controller. The noise gate's threshold level control is here, along with two parallel effects loops that have separate mix level controls. There's plenty of output scope too, with separate preamp and line sockets as well as five speaker jacks that can handle almost any combination of cabinet. MIDI is an Engl speciality that you can use to access all the InVader's switching functions, storing up to 128 presets. Without getting too bogged down in the technical details, this means you can effectively treat the InVader as an eight-channel amplifier as each channel can be selected with or without the gain boost engaged, as well as having the amp send or receive program change commands from other MIDI devices, like a sequencer or an effects unit.

If you're beginning to hyperventilate

at this point, try to relax and stop searching for a paper bag as, despite the InVader's complexity, its control layout and switching is logically arranged and getting to grips with it is much easier than you'd expect. This is helped by a very well-written and informative instruction manual. If you don't want to use MIDI at all, there is provision for alternative footswitching, using either Engl's own stageboard or a standard latching two button controller that will simply let you access the four channel presets, which you can set up and store to taste.

**SOUNDS:** Engl is up with the world's best for manufacturing quality and the same thing goes for its tone. Like the incredible SE we reviewed in issue 263, the InVader is capable of delivering an extraordinarily wide range of sounds, all of them highly usable.

As we mentioned above, each of the InVader's four channels can be used for rhythm or lead work, although channels 1 and 2 are the most rewarding for cleaner sounds while 3 and 4 deliver the goods when cranked up with lots of distortion. Channel 1 is brighter and appears to have a little more headroom, while channel 2 is more dynamic in terms of its response and ideally suited for medium gain blues/rock playing, setting up the amp to distort when you hit the strings →

it should be used as a last resort.

The InVader 150 is a four-channel amp, but with a slightly different approach as all channels can be used for rhythm and lead work, the difference between them being more to do with tone and dynamics than gain.

The front panel is busy yet neatly laid out and easy to follow, although as with most Engls, it helps to have the instruction manual to hand. Each of the four channels gets the usual gain, volume and three-band EQ – over to the right there are global controls for presence and Engl's depth punch function, which respectively fine-tune the power amp's high and low frequency response, along with two switchable master volumes. Near the single input jack, a pair of small pushbutton switches operate a global

### ENGL INVADER 150 HEAD

**PRICE:** £1,899

**ORIGIN:** Germany

**TYPE:** All valve four-channel Class AB head with solid-state rectification

**OUTPUT:** 150W RMS

**VALVES:** Four ECC83/12AX7 preamp, six EL34 power amp

**DIMENSIONS:** 280 (h) x 710 (w) x 290mm (d)

**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 24/53

**CABINET:** Birch ply

**CHANNELS:** Four, all

switchable between hi/lo gain modes.

Programmable preset memory

**CONTROLS:** Gain, bass

mid and treble, channel

volume x four, presence,

depth punch, master

volume x 2

**FOOTSWITCH:** Engl's

Z12 MIDI controller is the

recommended option,

offering up to 128 preset

patches and costs an

extra £189. It can be

phantom-powered by

the amp

**ADDITIONAL**

**FEATURES:** Switchable

hi/lo gain on all channels,

bright switch on channels

1 and 2, fixed level

preamp and line outputs,

dual parallel effects loops

with mix controls,

noisegate, computer-

controlled valve

monitoring (shuts down

power stage

automatically on fault),

MIDI in and MIDI thru

with phantom power for

Engl controllers, MIDI

control over all preset and

channel switching

functions with up to 128

presets, main circuit

ground lift

**OPTIONS:** E412 cab

(£559), Vintage 412 cab

loaded with Celestion

V30s (£799)

**Synergy Distribution**

**01827 313134**

**www.engl-amps.com**



### The rivals

Marshall JVM410H head	£899
Hughes & Kettner Triamp Mk II head	£1,799
Rivera KR100	
Knucklehead Reverb head	£1,899

Marshall's all-new JVM head looks set to corner the market in four-channel flexibility – it has classic Marshall looks coupled with huge flexibility and is also MIDI-powered. The one thing that's going to give all other manufacturers a really hard time though is the price: it's less than half the cost of the Engl. Hughes & Kettner's Triamp is another great looking, great-sounding German amp that's guaranteed to excite, with six quasi-independent preamp channels and MIDI as an option via the MSM-1 module. Rivera's flagship is arguably one of the world's top five super-amps, with three channels delivering every classic American and Brit sound you can dream of. For the ultimate in power, the KR100's dedicated sub output can be hooked up to one of Rivera's powered sub cabinets like the KS312, turning it into a 400 or even 500-watt festival monster that will project for miles. MIDI switching is standard on this amp and the highly versatile Headmaster floor controller is included in the price. Any one of these three is guaranteed to deliver world-class tone with pro-standard reliability.



The ground lift switch can be used to remove hum from ground loops

hard. Channels 3 and 4 seem to work better in high gain mode; the former is biased towards the scooped out mid-range sound that's still very fashionable, while the latter benefits from increased mid-range punch and was this reviewer's favourite for solo work, though it demands a more precise picking technique. All four channels have an American bias, but the Engl is full of character and has its own personality.

The Invader's built-in noise gate was easy to set up and proved especially useful in keeping background hiss out of the way, although it should be mentioned the Engl is electrically very well-behaved, with signal to noise ratios that are better than many amps in this class. There's a barely audible 'pop' as the gate triggers, but it isn't really necessary to use it at low volume levels, so this isn't a problem. However, using this amp as it should really be heard will be a problem for some players as the Invader is a monumentally loud amplifier, so loud in fact that our test 4 x 12 loaded with 240 watts of loudspeakers was

### The Invader is capable of delivering an extraordinarily wide range of sounds, all of them highly usable

#### ENGL INVADER 150 HEAD TEST RESULTS

Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

■ **WE LIKED** The range of sounds and control; superb MIDI implementation; seamless switching; very low noise levels; great manual

■ **WE DISLIKED** Without a low power option it's overkill for many players

beginning to sound stressed as the Invader's volume controls were wound up beyond threat level. There is no low power or pentode/triode switching available that can be used to tame the Engl's output stage, so be warned – this is an amp that takes no prisoners. While it sounds good at typical small to medium-sized rock gig volume levels it's really intended for stadiums and very large concert halls, where a pair of cabinets will really help you to get your point over to the masses with power to spare.

#### Verdict

Engl has mastered the difficult art of building multi-function amps that deliver great tone no matter what preset you use, and the Invader is no exception. It's an excellent design that's easy to get to grips with, versatile and great fun to use. Compared to the competition it's reasonably well priced too, bearing in mind this is a high-end amp aimed primarily at professional users. It sounds superb, although that awesome high volume capability means that it's overkill for the average pub player and best suited for the lucky few who travel to their gigs in limos or helicopters. **B**

NB: Guitarist would like to thank Machinehead Music of Hitchin for their kind assistance and loan of this amp.

#### Engl Invader 150 head

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★