

MARSHALL HAZE MHZ40C COMBO & MHZ15 HEAD WITH 112A & 112B CABS £549 & £439, £155 & £155
GUITAR AMPS



PHOTOGRAPHY BY PHILIP SOWELS

Marshall Haze MHZ40C combo & MHZ15 head with 112A & 112B cabs

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Tone, portability and everyday payability: purple prose or is Marshall really smokin' with these? *by Mick Taylor*

Amp titan Marshall may be best known for those towering stacks that form the very walls of rock's Iconatorium, but the company has periodically produced tasty little amps too. The new Haze series is designed to offer a sensible range of real-world features in compact packages to meet our rehearsing, recording and small gigging needs.

There are two models in the range – a 40-watt 1 x 12 combo that runs on a pair of EL34 output valves and, somewhat unusually for Marshall, a dual 6V6-powered 15-watt head with matching 1 x 12 cabs. Both share the basic channel and effects layouts, with the combo offering an additional boost function and more hook-up options. Each amp is voiced to make the best of those differing glass power bottles.

Both amps begin with a two-channel design; 'normal' handles clean to crunch, and 'overdrive' goes from crunch to higher gain. The 40-watt combo also has a boost that works in both channels which, according to Marshall's R&D designer James Marchant, changes the overdrive stage from a clipping- to a saturation-style character, courtesy of a clever bit of bias adjustment.

The amount of boost is considerable but it's fixed, so your guitar's volume control is all-important in achieving the texture and response you like best from the boosted mode.

If you go for the optional Haze Footcontroller (£39), the boost is also footswitchable, giving you four basic sounds at your feet. The standard/ included switch is a two-button unit that changes channel and

switches the effects on and off. The optional four-way switch will work with the 15-watter, but the boost switch is redundant given that the head has no boost. Both amps have a global three-band EQ section, while the combo gets an additional presence control.

Each Haze model comes with a collection of digitally created effects that are designed to retain a good deal of analogue warmth and feel. The emulated spring reverb has its own pot and can be switched completely out of the circuit if you so desire. In addition you have a choice of vibrato (vibe, orange), delay (echo, green) and chorus (red) courtesy of a push-switch that changes colour to indicate the effect selected. The adjust pot changes an effect's parameter: delay time from short slapback through to 1000ms; vibrato depth and chorus depth.

One cool thing about the effects sections in both amps is that each channel 'remembers' its effects settings. So, for example, you can set up a clean tone with a bit of reverb and chorus, then switch to a no-reverb overdrive sound with delay in channel two. Until you physically switch off any of the effects, they'll always be there in that specific channel: neat. One minor downside is that there's a short but noticeable delay when switching channels due to the relays used. The pay-off is that switching is silent with no pops or clunks.

Given that Marshall has gone to the trouble of designing them into the combo, it seems an oversight to omit the speaker-emulated line-out and effects loop options from the head. The loop is a simple series affair, so

pedals and units with their own level controls work best, while the line out offers a direct feed straight to a desk or mixing console. It's not as realistic as a sympathetically mic'd speaker, but it's immeasurably better than a dry, non-EQ'd DI.

Partnering the 15-watt head are the natty MHZ112A (angled) and MHZ112B

The Rivals

MHZ40C

The **Fender Hot Rod Deluxe** (£709.99) is the king at this level; more US in tone, spring reverb, but no digital effects. The **Hughes & Kettner Statesman Quad EL84** (£835) offers US/UK tone but again, no effects. **Line 6's Spider Valve 1 x 12** (£608.35) marries tube power with digital modelling and effects.

(straight) closed-back 1 x 12 extension cabinets. Each loaded with one Celestion G12-66 Marquee speaker – the same as in the combo – they're decked in classic Marshall livery to create a have-to-have-it mid-size stack. If you want to cart it round in your car boot, check that all three boxes fit – they don't in this reviewer's motor.

With the Haze 40 combo, Marshall is offering a no-nonsense classic-voiced 1 x 12 package





The [15-watt head's] lower power rating means you can crank it right up for rehearsals and little gigs

The combo is in a sensibly sized, rear-ported box; not so small that the tone is boxy, but not too big that it won't fit in the back seat of the car, or indeed in the aforementioned boot along with a modest pedalboard, leads bag and two gigbags.

All the enclosures are made of particleboard, a concession to cost and generally frowned upon for guitar amps given its dead/inert tonal nature, though the finger jointed cabs at least offer good rigidity, capped with those tough plastic corners that, attached to a 1960 4 x 12 cab, have battered many a wall, staircase and fire escape.

Sounds

Starting with the 40-watt combo, there's enough clean headroom in the normal

channel for funky chord parts and single-note lines to cut through the mix in a sensible pub band. The bottom end remains tight, with a fairly hard treble and punchy mids: very Marshally clean, you might say, and quite different from the bloomy, chimey openness of Fender's ubiquitous Hot Rod Deluxe. Upping the volume brings in a certain edge, but if you want crunch from the normal channel, it's better to use the boost function; it's not entirely unlike a well-opened JCM800 in fact, with a sizzly classic rock crunch. Here, the slight hardness apparent in the clean voice comes into its own by keeping things focused and able to cut through, yet still sit in a band mix. In many people's minds this is what Marshalls

were 'for' in the pre-JCM900 days, and also where the aforementioned Hot Rod Deluxe struggles somewhat.

Moving on to the overdrive channel brings in, as you'd expect, more distortion. It ranges from a light drive that sounds a little weaker than the clean channel's crunch mode, through to a tight (in a good way) distortion that keeps the notes cutting through. This isn't a metal monster, not least because of its 1 x 12 format, and even with the boost switch engaged, it always feels slightly more classic rock than modern metal. Cranked up, the power section begins to sag a little, though it retains the EL34's relatively tight bottom end to provide good note separation. If you want super-smooth and creamy Santana-style distortion, just add a distortion pedal of your preference.

The 6V6-powered 15-watt head and closed-back cabs offer more apparent bottom-end response, with the

characteristic chunk that you get with physically moving air. The gain range isn't hugely dissimilar to the one we heard with the combo, though it feels slightly more dynamic under your fingers. This is presumably thanks to the 6V6 tubes, which work so well in amps such as Fender's '65 Deluxe Reverb and Tweed Deluxe. As a very general rule, many people think of them as 'little-big tubes' – not as pokey or wiry as EL84s, but not as big and powerful as 6L6s. The overall result here is less general aggression in the cleans and a marginally looser feel to the drive.

The 'bright' switch does more than add sparkle; it tightens up the response and puts a cutting edge on notes that, while a little harsh on bridge-position single-coils, helps humbuckers – especially on darker sounding guitars – really come to life. The lower power rating here means that you can crank it right up for rehearsals and little gigs; in a couple of band rehearsals this reviewer found it just about able to cut through a pretty loud pub band's two-guitars-bass-and-drums mix. Not bad at all for just 15 watts.

The effects are dead easy to set up, and Marshall should be credited for their all-round quality and ease of use. Some may wish for more control over parameters such as delay decay, but the settings offered make sense in most classic rock and pop applications. It's a boon to have them at your fingertips, but it's worth asking whether some players would trade this

The Rivals

MHZ15

The **Orange Tiny Terror** (£313) is first port of call for straight-up 15-watt valve heads, albeit basic in terms of features compared with the Haze. We're very impressed with the **Vox Night Train** (£425), which adds more functionality. The **Blackheart BH15H Handsome Devil** (£382) is another cool 15-watt valve head, but again lacks effects, leaving the Marshall in a class of its own.



The effect in use is signalled by a multi-coloured LED switch

versatility in for better quality cabinets and a variable boost.

Verdict

Compact, mid-powered valve workhorses are the amps most of us use, most of the time. With the Haze 40 combo, Marshall is offering a no-nonsense classic-voiced 1 x 12 package that many would argue has been absent since the venerable JCM800 4010 combo of the eighties. Similarly, the 15 takes some of the 2061x 20-watt head's heritage and makes it more user-friendly, versatile and affordable. Moreover, until now there was a surprising lack of good value, Brit-flavoured alternatives to Fender's Hot Rod and Blues Deluxe stalwarts. Cost concessions put clear water between these and the big M's low-power Handwired models, but compared with amps in their price bracket there's a great deal here to like. **G**

The Bottom Line

Marshall Haze MHZ40C combo

We like: Classic looks and tones; sensible features; compact portability

We dislike: Not too keen on the particleboard cabinet

Guitarist says: A credible all-rounder for classic rock and blues

Marshall Haze MHZ15

We like: As the MHZ40C

We dislike: As the MHZ40C, plus there's no boost option or emulated DI out; significant background noise when cranked

Guitarist says: Who wouldn't want one? A Brit bluesy-rocky Marshall valve stack... only smaller!



The effects and emulated spring reverb have their own separate controls



Marshall Haze MHZ40C combo

PRICE: £549
ORIGIN: India
TYPE: All-valve twin-channel combo with solid-state rectification and digital effects
POWER: 40 watts
VALVES: 3 x ECC83, 2 x EL34
CONTROLS: Normal channel: volume, bright switch, boost switch. Overdrive channel: gain, volume, boost switch. Shared bass, middle, treble, presence, reverb level, effects depth, adjust and selector switch
SPEAKER: 1 x 12-inch Celestion G12-66 Marquee
FOOTSWITCH: Two-way switch supplied (channel and FX on/off), four-way optional (£39, also offers boost and reverb on/off)
ADDITIONAL FEATURES: 1 x 16 ohm and 1 x 8 ohm speaker out, speaker-emulated line out, effects loop
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 20.3/44.8
DIMENSIONS: 590 (w) x 500 (h) x 260mm (d)
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: See MHZ15 and MHZ112A & 112B
Marshall Amplification
01908 375411
www.marshallamps.com

Test results

Build quality ★★★★★
Features ★★★★★
Sound ★★★★★
Value for money ★★★★★

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Marshall Haze MHZ15 head

PRICE: £439
ORIGIN: India
TYPE: All-valve twin-channel head with solid-state rectification and digital effects
POWER: 15 watts
VALVES: 3 x ECC83, 2 x 6V6
CONTROLS: Normal channel: volume. Overdrive channel: gain, volume. Shared: bass, middle, treble, bright switch, reverb level, effects depth, adjust and selector switch
SPEAKER: N/A
FOOTSWITCH: Two-way switch supplied (channel and FX on/off), four-way optional (£39, see copy)
ADDITIONAL FEATURES: 1 x 16 ohm and 2 x 8 ohm speaker out
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 9.3/20.5
DIMENSIONS: 500 (w) x 240 (h) x 220mm (d)
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: See MHZ40C

MHZ112A & 112B cabinets

PRICE: £155 each
ORIGIN: India
TYPE: 1 x 12 extension speaker cabinet
POWER HANDLING: 66 watts @ 16-ohms
ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Angled or straight versions available
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 12/26.5
DIMENSIONS: 500 (w) x 510 (h) x 265 (d)
RANGE OPTIONS: Marshall produces a wide range of 1 x 12, 2 x 12 and 4 x 12 speaker enclosures

Test results

Build quality ★★★★★
Features ★★★★★
Sound ★★★★★
Value for money ★★★★★

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★