

MARSHALL MA50C & MA100H PLUS M412A CAB £577, £548 & £287
GUITAR AMPS



PHOTOGRAPHY BY JESSEWILD

Marshall MA50C, MA100H & M412A cab **£577, £548 & £287**

Marshall's brand new MA series promises ultimate all-valve Brit-rock tones, but at a price that won't break the bank. We're intrigued... *by Dave Durban*

Marshall has been a hive of activity of late, with a string of high-profile releases including the new solid-state MG series, the low-cost Haze series and the Class 5 combo. Marshall's historical lifeblood is its 50- and 100-watt models, however, a market that's been attacked in the mid-price range from all fronts.

It's a good time then for Marshall to release its new bread-and-butter amp range –

the MA series. We spoke with Marshall's head of R&D, Laurent Veignal, to learn more.

"We were losing share in the low-end valve market," he says frankly, "and we wanted to have something to compete in that segment. That was our first and most important decision, because we know we can really compete – we've already got a range of successful OEM [Original Equipment Manufacturer] products with

the MG series." He continues: "However, so far we haven't entered the all-valve OEM market and we didn't want to be seen to be left behind."

Before MA, Marshall's least expensive all-valve, 100-watt head and 50-watt combo was the Vintage Modern series VM2266H head (£845) and the VM2266C combo (£894).

So, who is the new range aimed at specifically? "The series runs between 50- and

100-watt head and combo variations and so really it's aimed towards people who are actually gigging – in pubs and other such places," says Veignal.

MA50C

Marshall has the strongest brand of any amp company, so as you'd expect the MA range pays homage to its forebears with a front-mounted gold control panel, the same black vinyl Marshall has been using for 15 years and black grille cloth, but with black piping, as opposed to the usual white found on the UK-made amps.

The combo's straightforward front panel makes it – on paper at least – a no-frills, easy-to-use amp. Laurent adds: "The idea was to try to minimise the amount of controls on the front panel, but also allow you to maintain maximum flexibility and efficiency to tailor your sound on stage."



Three steps to eleven: clean, OD and OD boost, all footswitchable

The MA has two channels – clean and overdrive – with an overdrive boost for added versatility. The clean channel feeds a standard three-band EQ, which is followed by a clean volume control. The overdrive channel, however, is a slightly more involved prospect, especially with the intriguing inclusion of Marshall's new 'crunch balance' control – more on which later. Other than that, the overdrive channel features gain, bass, middle, treble and volume controls. There's also a master control section for the built-in Sohoacoustic spring reverb unit, plus resonance and presence controls. Channel selections are indicated by green (clean channel) and red (overdrive channel and overdrive boost) LEDs. Two switches on the front-panel enable you to switch between them manually.

As mentioned, the MA features the new crunch balance control. To use and understand it, it's helpful to think in reverse – start by setting gain and volume levels for your desired boosted solo or highest-gain tone, deselect the overdrive boost, then work with the crunch balance to set the gain for your rhythm sound. Doing it that way means you don't affect the overdrive boost's tonality and reduces the need to build-in another EQ section for the overdrive boost. Simple and neat, it keeps the feature-set uncluttered, cost-effective but still versatile.

The supplied Marshall footswitch helps ensure maximum versatility for live

performance by giving a number of selectable tones. For example, clean to overdrive, clean to boosted overdrive and overdrive to boosted overdrive.

Again to keep costs down, Marshall has opted for particleboard cabinets instead of ply and the combo has three ports at the rear, which serves to keep the bottom end tight and full, but releases enough air to stop the cab sounding overly directional or boxy. Alongside this, the new back panel – according to Marshall – serves three general purposes; it offers the right acoustics, satisfies the health and safety people by protecting the user from the valves (instead of the more expensive metal cage option) and finally it provides adequate venting for the tubes.

While we're round there, the back panel features a serial external effects loop with send and return sockets and effects bypass switch; 8- and 16-ohm impedance options, footswitch input and IEC mains connector. Side handles help with portability and tough plastic corners give extra protection.

Sounds

Powered up, the MA50C's clean channel proves quick and easy to dial in. The immediate clean tone is right in that traditional EL-34, Marshall ballpark – glassy in the top-end, hard mid-range and solid bass response – great for live use, though a little tough for homely ears, or those used to the roundness of a Fender-style clean tone.

To sweeten things up, you can always add in a dash of available

Two bright orange LEDs illuminate the interior of the cabinet and highlight the power valves spectacularly

spring reverb for a more elastic feel. The clean channel stays relatively 'clean' right up until the volume control is on full tilt, when it presents some grit around the edges.

Working back-to-front; switching in the overdrive boost reveals a substantial volume jump from the normal overdrive channel, and with the gain set around halfway it offers huge, adrenaline-fuelled high-gain overdrive tones similar to Slash-style lead romps and a couple of hard rockin' JCM800s. That said, it handles roaring modern metal tones well too.

The overdrive channel is a more measured affair. It's Marshall classic rock to its core and allows you to really dig into those rhythm sections of the song, suiting all manner of classic guitars from Teles to Les Pauls. And in that respect the MA50C does an impressive job of letting through plenty of your guitar's inherent character too. That's relatively unusual among lower-priced amps.

The crunch balance enables you to really differentiate between the rhythm and solo modes while maintaining the gain and volume presets for the boosted mode. The key to great tone here is balancing the overdrive volume, gain and crunch balance controls carefully. We find that the best results come from setting the control just over halfway – offering thick AC/DC-style sounds that can still edge on blues-rock solo tones. If you fancy something a little wilder and gainier, however, you can crank the control to produce a distinctly heavier sound.

The MA50C's cabinet sounds big and expressive for a 1x12 and the matched Eminence AX-75 offers a very welcome 'player's feel' to proceedings. Couple that with the relatively easy lugability and you've got a capable gigging combo here.

MA100H

The MA100H follows the same general feature template as our

MA50C combo, but with twice the power supplied by a quartet of EL-34 power valves.

Where Marshall's concerned, keeping that classic modern Marshall look was essential for the MA series, but alongside the usual gold-fronted control panel and black vinyl covering, the clever chaps over at Bletchley R&D have a rather neat trick up their sleeves...

On first inspection, the front baffle looks like any other Marshall-style baffle board, until you power the amp up. Two bright orange LEDs illuminate the interior of the cabinet and highlight the power valves spectacularly. This effect is visible through the black cloth, where the white Marshall script logo is mounted onto a solid piece of transparent Perspex. This is a neat effect, and gives those previously uninitiated into the valve-amp

The Rivals

Marshall MA50C

Peavey's Valve King 1 x 12 (£413) is an all-valve, 50-watt, twin-channel combo that packs a punch. The **Line 6 Spider Valve II 1 x 12** (£631.35) offers versatility with its built-in modulation effects and 40-watt all-valve power stage. Finally, **Laney's LC30-112** (589.95) is a twin-channel all-valve 30-watt, EL84-equipped combo with independent EQ.

Marshall MA100H

The seminal 100-watt rock head is **Marshall's 1959SLP Handwired 100-watt Super Lead** (£1561.01), made famous by Hendrix, Page et al. **Peavey** offers the Valve King in head form with the **VK100 head** (£413) – a 100-watt twin-channel rock machine. The **Laney GH100L** (£749.95) is a single-channel monster packing an all-valve punch at a mid-priced level.



world some real visual wow factor – it looks great on a darkened stage!

MA412A

This full-size Marshall 4 x 12 cabinet is designed specifically for the 50- and 100-watt heads in the MA series, but also offers players with other Marshall head models a cheaper option than the stalwart 1960 4 x 12. The angled-front cab we have here is loaded with four 12-inch Eminence AX-75 speakers, designed to offer clarity, power and punch for optimal valve-amp rock tone.

The cab is built on usual Marshall high-quality cabinetry, using interlocking finger joints for strength, rugged plastic corners and built-in plastic carry handles. Again, rather than ply, it's a particleboard cab.

Sounds

Like the combo, the MA100's clean channel is voiced right in that British tone camp. Through the accompanying 4 x 12 it's even more strident in the top-end with a glassier overall response, though it's by no means excessively shrill or brittle. It's also notable that at higher volumes the response tends to fatten up and adds some mild fizz round the edges, which works really nicely with a Strat or soapbar single-coil-equipped guitar. The reverb again helps to add ambience to what can be quite a hard tone.

Working from the boost overdrive channel downward, we find the MA100H to have a fuller and harder response compared to the more compact MA50C. The boosted tone is rich and responsive, with a huge amount of silky gain that can surely cater for most heavy rock and metal needs, while offering those with low-slung Les Pauls a really sumptuous classic rock lead sound.

The overdrive channel takes a little more encouragement to match the pumped-up tones, and we'd say the best balance comes from setting the crunch balance control on nearly full tilt, creating a warm yet cutting classic rock tone suited perfectly to a high output 'bucker or stacked single-coil. Again, the amp is pleasingly transparent and delivers a lot of



Guitarist CHOICE

your guitar's original character – great if you like to use different guitars to get different tones.

The Verdict

The MA series is an impressive step into the low-priced valve amp market for Marshall. Designed to appeal to serious minded players on a budget, or those keen for their first all-valve experience, the MA series offers you a no-brainer choice – especially those with blues-rock to heavy rock and metal tastes. At 50- or 100-watts, though, this series is definitely not for bedroom heroes – they sound and perform best when cranked up loud to proper gig levels.

The MA50C is well put together and tonally versatile, making it ideal as a go-anywhere, small-medium gig and rehearsing amp. The MA100H is very much the louder, bigger brother with plenty of rock attitude to suit budding stadiumites – we love the see-through front too.

All in all, we're talking superb value for money, no-nonsense noise machines that say Marshall on the front: none more rock!

The bottom line

Marshall MA50C

We like: Build quality; price; versatile tones; crunch balance control

We dislike: The particleboard cabinets

Guitarist says: Want a portable, giggable combo that packs punch, but for sensible money? Look here

Marshall MA100H

We like: LED-backlit valves; rock tones; build and price

We dislike: As the MA50C

Guitarist says: After an affordable, powerful, rock amp with visual wow factor? Put this at the top of your list

Marshall MA100H

PRICE: £577

ORIGIN: Vietnam

TYPE: All-valve twin-channel amp head with solid-state rectification

OUTPUT: 100 watts RMS

VALVES: 3 x ECC83/12AX7 preamp, 4 x EL34 power

CHANNELS: Two with selectable overdrive boost

CONTROLS: Overdrive channel; treble, middle, bass, crunch balance, gain and volume. Clean channel; treble, middle, bass and volume. Master controls include reverb, resonance and presence

FOOTSWITCH: Two-way Marshall footswitch (included)

ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Serial effects loop (-10dBV nominal level), two 8-ohm, one 16-ohm speaker outs

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 18.4/40.5

DIMENSIONS: 750(h) x 3120(l) x 250mm (d)

RANGE OPTIONS: The MA100C (£663) is the 2 x 12 combo version of the MA100H head and features two Eminence AX-75 speakers

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Marshall M412A

PRICE: £287

ORIGIN: Vietnam

TYPE: Angled 4 x 12 speaker cabinet

SPEAKERS: 4 x 12 Eminence AX-75

POWER: 300 watts RMS

IMPEDANCE: 16-ohm mono

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 36.3/80

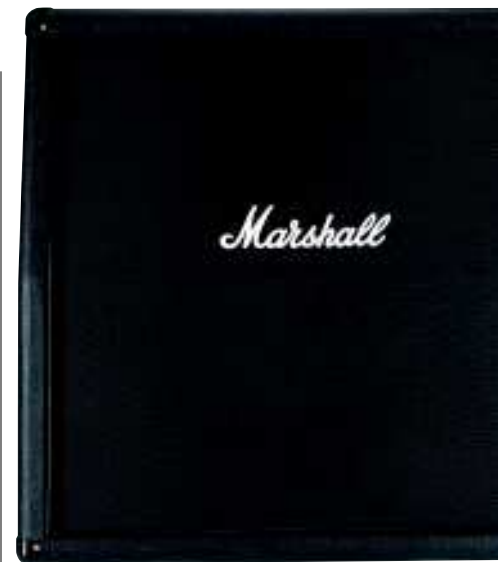
DIMENSIONS: 755(h) x 765(l) x 365mm (d)

RANGE OPTIONS: Also available in base format as the M412B (£287)

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Marshall MA50C

PRICE: £548

ORIGIN: Vietnam

TYPE: All-valve twin-channel 1 x 12 combo with solid-state rectification

OUTPUT: 50 watts RMS

VALVES: 3 x ECC83/12AX7 preamp, 2 x EL34 power

DIMENSIONS: 750(h) x 310(l) x 250mm (d)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 22/48.5

CHANNELS: Two with selectable overdrive boost

CONTROLS: Overdrive channel; treble, middle, bass, crunch balance, gain and volume. Clean channel; treble, middle, bass and volume. Master controls include reverb, resonance and presence

FOOTSWITCH: Two-way Marshall footswitch (included)

ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Serial effects loop (-10dBV nominal level), two 8-ohm, one 16-ohm speaker outs

RANGE OPTIONS: The MA50H (£480) is a 50-watt head version

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★