

FIRST PLAY



ROLAND JC-40
£549

WHAT IS IT? A scaled-down version of Roland's classic JC-120 combo, built to celebrate that amp's 40th anniversary





Chorus of Approval

Roland celebrates 40 years of the Jazz Chorus with this new gig-ready compact combo complete with that signature chorus sound

Words Nick Guppy Photography Neil Godwin

It's not every day that a guitar amplifier celebrates 40 years of production, so when Roland's venerable Jazz Chorus range passed the milestone this year, what better way to celebrate it than with another new amp – appropriately named the JC-40. The original JC-120 was the first product to feature Roland's smooth analogue Chorus Ensemble effect, arriving in the shops back in 1975 and pre-dating the first Boss CE-1 by around a year.

Despite a complete lack of valves, at a time when many other solid-state products were little more than primitive amplified fuzz boxes, the Jazz Chorus carved its own niche, with unique styling and an unmistakable clean sound that continues to form the backbone of many top player's rigs today, from Pat Metheny to Metallica. Away from stadium rock, we can't ignore the African influence that gained greater prominence in the 1980s, largely thanks to Paul Simon's *Graceland* album. Make no mistake: the Jazz Chorus is the sound of African guitar.

Back in the mid 1970s, many players saw the Jazz Chorus as a more reliable version of another large valve-powered 2x12 combo, which was on practically every stage back then. Its unique look stuck in people's minds, and the sound proved to be the perfect foil for the heavy overdriven lead tones that were



becoming more and more popular. 40 years on, the Jazz Chorus is still going strong in its original 120-watt format. Now, we have a combo that promises the same great tones in a smaller package.

Essentially a scaled-down version of its big brother, the JC-40 features a pair of 20-watt output stages driving two 10-inch loudspeakers. The cabinet follows traditional JC flight case styling, with 'ready-rubbed' rivets on the front and silver dust caps on the loudspeakers behind the silver check grille-cloth. Inside the chassis there's a familiar-looking rugged printed circuit board holding most of the controls and front panel components. The JC-40's control panel offers a single channel, with mono and stereo inputs and controls for volume, bass, mid and treble, alongside the amp's built-in overdrive and reverb effects. The chorus section has speed and depth controls, with a four-way switch

that selects vibrato, off and fixed or manual control for the chorus.

On the rear, there are separate footswitch options for all three effects, together with a mono out/stereo in effects loop that can be run in series or parallel mode, and a speaker-emulated headphone jack that's ideal for silent practice.

Feel & Sounds

The JC-40's stereo front panel inputs make it a perfect partner for players who use multi-effects floorboards, with wide-range clarity that will need a little tweaking if you want to keep some warmth in your sounds. We tried the JC-40 with single coil and humbucking guitars, both of which sounded equally impressive. The built-in distortion is somewhat warmer and smoother than earlier models, while the digital reverb is smooth and spacious, with a decently long tail. The

1. The JC-40 comes with Roland's distinctive loudspeakers, which have silver dust caps, just like the originals

2. The legendary Jazz chorus sound is a true wet/dry effect, using both speakers in stereo

3. The effects loop is mono out, stereo return and can run in series or parallel modes

4. The classic JC styling is recreated in miniature for the JC-40, complete with ready-rubbed rivets

5. With a choice of mono or stereo inputs, the JC-40 is a perfect partner for both multi-effects floorboards and pedal users

JC-40's chorus effect outputs a dry signal to one loudspeaker and a wet effect-only signal to the other, creating a three-dimensional soundstage that swirls and pulses in a very pleasing way. This is the core of the JC-40's sound – a distinctive and unique chorus effect that's been copied many times over the years, but it's hard to imagine anyone other than Roland doing it this well. You can control the speed and depth yourself using the Manual setting, or choose Roland's optimal settings with the Fixed option.

The vibrato effect adds another more vintage dimension with a wide range of speed and depth that covers ethereal, slow pulse effects to full-on surf. The JC-40 is also very pedal friendly, and sounds excellent with a high-end overdrive pedal plugged into the input jack.

Verdict

The JC-40 is a worthy addition to Roland's catalogue, with enough volume to make it usable for small gigs, while the stereo input makes it an ideal partner for pedalboards and multi-effects. One big selling point is how compact and portable it is: easily carried with one hand and small enough to fit on one seat of an average family hatchback, it's ideal for small clubs, practice or rehearsals. However, it is on the pricey side and faces stiff competition from many other mid-priced products with onboard effects, although not many are true stereo and none will have the JC-40's signature 3D wet/dry chorus. If you fancy plugging into a little history, check it out. **G**



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ROLAND JC-40 JAZZ CHORUS 2X10 COMBO

PRICE: £549

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Solid state combo

OUTPUT: 2x 20W RMS

VALVES: None

DIMENSIONS: 436 (h) x 592 (w) 251mm (d)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 16/35

CABINET: Ply

CHANNELS: 1

CONTROLS: Volume, bass, mid, treble, distortion, reverb, modulation speed and depth, chorus/vibrato select switch

FOOTSWITCH: Up to 3 footswitches control chorus, distortion and reverb effects

ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Bright switch, mono in/stereo out effects loop with series/parallel switch, mono/stereo line out and headphones jack

RANGE OPTIONS: The latest version of the original and considerably louder JC-120 is available for £979

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7/10

PROS Decent build quality, excellent tone and that wonderful stereo chorus effect

CONS On the pricey side; a fourth footswitch socket to switch the effects loop on/off would be nice

