



Line 6 Spider IV 30

Group Test

Modelling Practice Amps

To snare serious rock star tones on a budget, all you have to do is find the right modelling amp. TG tests four of the best sub-£200 examples

WORDS **ED MITCHELL**



Vox VT20+

Laney Linebacker LR20

Roland Cube-20XL

Not so long ago, practice amps were sorry looking affairs with a couple of knobs and all the tonal sophistication of a transistor radio. How times have changed. These days entry-level modelling practice amps are packing more fab technology than The Beatles had at their disposal in the 60s, giving you a truck load of opportunities all in one place.

For the benefit of any uninitiated readers among you, this nifty modelling technology reproduces the tonal characteristics of a hoard of classic and modern guitar amplifiers and stompboxes. This means you can choose from the clean sound of a 50s valve amp, say, or a raging metal stack (and all points in between) while adding a bunch of effects into the mix. The icing on the cake is that you can run a

modelling amp at bedroom volume and still enjoy a tone that would kill on the live circuit.

There's a huge choice of affordable modelling practice amps available these days, so to narrow the field a touch we've selected four of the best entry-level amps to fight it out in our Group Test. While the Line 6 Spider IV 30 (£159) has been around for a little while, the Laney Linebacker LR20 (£92), Roland Cube-20XL (£139) and Vox VT20+ (£144) models get to battle it out in their first-ever reviews right here in the pages of TG. ■

"CHOOSE FROM A 50S VALVE AMP OR A RAGING METAL STACK"


Flip the page to find out which one won our Group Test head-to-head



Laney Linebacker LR20

£92

Ready for a touchdown?

Aux in
Plug your iPod in and jam along with your favourite tunes



Mod FX
The LR20 is packing four modulation effects: chorus, flange, phase and tremolo

Models
Amp models include a couple of Tony Iommi (Black Sabbath) sounds

At a glance

Laney Linebacker LR20

TYPE: Modelling amp
OUTPUT: 20 watts
SPEAKER: 1x8"
CONTROLS: Amp model, volume, channel, presence, contour, mod, delay, tuner
SOCKETS: Guitar input, auxiliary input, 2x footswitch, headphones/record output
WEIGHT: 8.5kg
DIMENSIONS: [HxWxD mm] 364 x 358 x 211mm
CONTACT: Headstock Distribution 0121 5086666
WEB: www.laney.co.uk

Laney claims its new two-channel Linebacker LR20 has 22 amp models on offer. Well, what you actually get is the same 11 amp models repeated on each channel, but the good news is that these models are hot and hotter versions of Black Sabbath legend Tony Iommi's signature Laney head. So, we'll let Laney off with the ropey arithmetic.

Other amp models featured on the LR20 include classic Laney combos (the LC, VC and Lionheart) and a couple



of generic rock and metal sounds named Volt and Wreck respectively. Aside from Wreck, there are two variations on each model setting. For instance, while Heart models the clean channel of a Lionheart being

driven hard into vintage style overdrive, Heart+ is the same amp but with more gain. Each model has a preset tone that you can tweak with master presence and contour controls, and there's a choice of modulation effects (chorus, flange, phase and tremolo) and reverb and delay. All of these sounds are easy to access, even for amp virgins.

Conclusion: The Linebacker LR20 hasn't made the podium in this Group Test but it's definitely worth a blast. Old-school metal

fans in particular will love the Iommi signature settings. And, actually, since most potential customers for the LR20 probably won't know a Laney LC from a Lionheart, this amp is best regarded as a bunch of good quality tones bundled into an easy-to-navigate, amazingly affordable package.

SUMMARY

For: Decent bang for your buck
Against: Slightly outclassed here

★★★★☆

TG says: Sabbath on a budget

Vox Valvetronix VT20+

£152

Crank up the AC

Casing
The modelling technology is housed in Vox's old-school casing



Effects
The Valvetronix VT20+ has a massive 25 effects to play with

Presets
Save eight of your own amp and effects combinations



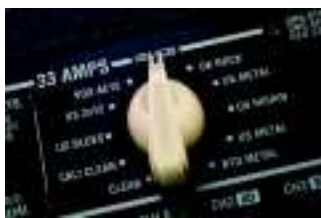
At a glance

Vox Valvetronix VT20+

TYPE: Modelling amp
OUTPUT: 30 watts
SPEAKER: 1x8"
VALVE: 1x 12AX7
CONTROLS: Amp model, gain, volume, treble, mid, bass, volume, power level, reverb, mod select, tuner
SOCKETS: Guitar in, aux input, headphones/recording output
WEIGHT: 8.8kg
DIMENSIONS: [HxWxD] 422 x 222 x 376mm
CONTACT: 01908 857101
WEB: www.voxamps.com

When a new Vox modelling amp falls into our clutches, the first thing we do is see how well it reproduces the company's legendary AC15 and AC30 models. The VT20+ nails the tone of those old-school classics with aplomb. But there's much more to this Vox...

This amp comes loaded! If you open a VT20+ box on Christmas morning you'll still be reading the spec list way past the Queen's speech. As well as



being the only amp in this test to feature a valve, you get 33 amp models (three variations of 11 amp types), 25 effects like chorus, auto wah and metal distortion, and 11 modulation

effects that include pitch shift and tape delay. There are 99 preset sounds and you can save eight of your own in the amp's memory. The Vox also has 33 preset song settings, giving you instant access to a diverse list of sounds based on famous songs.

Conclusion: The bells and whistles are all well and good, but in the end great tone is everything. That's where the Vox VT20+ excels. It's just so warm sounding, thanks to Vox's Valve

Reactor technology, and it nailed some of our favourite tones. No matter what level you're at – novice or pro – the VT20+, with its bargain price tag, will knock your socks off. The AC15 and AC30 sounds have us hooked. Try the Valvetronix VT20+ and we bet you'll want one, too.

SUMMARY

For: Awesome tones, huge spec list
Against: It's very hard to fault

★★★★★

TG says: This Vox pops

"BELLS AND WHISTLES ARE GOOD BUT GREAT TONE IS EVERYTHING - AND THAT'S WHERE THE VOX EXCELS"

Roland Cube-20XL £139

A square deal

Effects
The effects section includes a phaser, flanger, tremolo and a 'Heavy Octave'

Acoustic sim
Make your electric sound like an acoustic with the onboard simulator



Cabinet
The amp's cabinet is tougher than the cast of The Expendables

At a glance

Roland Cube-20XL

TYPE: Modelling amp
OUTPUT: 20 watts
SPEAKER: 1x8"
CONTROLS: Volume, lead channel: type, gain, volume, bass, mid and treble, EFX, delay/reverb, 'power squeeze'
SOCKETS: Guitar in, aux in, footswitch, headphones
WEIGHT: 9kg
DIMENSIONS: [HxWxD] 385 x 385 x 240mm
CONTACT: Roland UK 01792 702701
WEB: www.roland.co.uk

Late great comedian Bill Hicks once said that the only two things that would survive a nuclear war are Keith Richards and cockroaches. Well, you can add the Roland Cube-20XL to that list. This little amp looks indestructible with its chunky corner protectors and a seriously tough speaker grill. Obviously, Roland expects its new amp to do some travelling.

The Cube-20XL has a clean channel inspired by the classic Roland JC series amps and a



lead channel that runs from old-school overdrive and metal sounds to an über filth setting called Extreme. The amp is so well laid out that you'll nail the sound you want in no time at all. You'll also find a collection

of Boss stompbox effects onboard including a phaser, flanger, tremolo and an acoustic simulator. Yes, it really does make your electric guitar sound like an acoustic. If you prefer to rock out, try the Metal setting mixed with the Heavy Octave effect and then remind yourself that this is a mere practice amp.

Conclusion: The tough construction and quality of tone on offer here tips us off that Roland didn't set out just to design a practice amp. Despite

its humble wattage, the Cube-20XL could work its magic at low-level rehearsals; mic it up and we reckon it would work fine for gigs, too. This is a serious tone machine that performs way beyond its price tag. The fact is that if the Vox VT20+ wasn't so damn brilliant, the Roland could've taken the first prize.

SUMMARY

For: Tough build, great rock sounds

Against: Less models than the Vox

★★★★☆

TG says: Full of Boss sounds

Line 6 Spider IV 30 £159

It makes spidey-sense

Amp select
Extreme metalheads will love the 'Insane' amp setting. No gain, no pain!



Channel
You can program your own sounds into the Spider's memory bank

Speaker
There's a single 12-inch Celestion speaker lurking behind the grille cloth

At a glance

Line 6 Spider IV 30

TYPE: Modelling amp
OUTPUT: 30 watts
SPEAKER: 1x12" Celestion
CONTROLS: Amp model, 4x channel select buttons, drive, bass, mid, treble, channel volume, tuner, reverb, power on/off
SOCKETS: Guitar input, auxiliary input, footswitch, headphones/direct output
WEIGHT: 11.8kg
DIMENSIONS: [HxWxD] 444 x 470 x 241mm
CONTACT: Line 6 UK 01327 302700
WEB: www.line6.com

The Line 6 Spider range is a bit like Al Pacino. You know you're always going to get a killer performance, regardless of size. To give credit where it's due, Line 6 really kicked off the whole modelling craze in the 90s, making great sounding products that were affordable for everyone. The new Spider IV 30 continues that philosophy.

This latest Spider incarnation comes loaded with 12 amp models, seven effects (chorus/



flanger, phaser, tremolo, delay, tape echo, sweep echo and reverb) and four channels in which you can program your own sounds. The Spider is also packing a mean 12-incher in the

speaker department. The other amps in this test are brandishing a slightly less impressive eight inches. It's what you do with those extra four inches that counts. You'll likely notice them most when chugging out sixth string metal riffs on sounds like Insane, an extreme gain setting that's based on the classic Mesa/Boogie Dual Rectifier head.

Conclusion: We're not being cheeky when we say that the Spider IV 30 offers no real

surprises to long term Line 6 fans. The amp models and effects are spot on and the whole package is easy to use. If you're considering a modelling amp you have to try a Line 6. It's the law! Like Roland, Line 6 was pipped to the post by the Vox, but, man, was it a close one.

SUMMARY

For: The usual killer Spider sounds

Against: Heavier than others here

★★★★☆

TG says: This Spider's got legs