



PHOTOGRAPHY SIMON LEE



# Randall V2 £999

With three independent channels driven by Valve Dynamic technology, could this Randall be the pinnacle of hybrid amp design? by Simon Bradley

Even though companies such as Line 6 have made their name by emulating all-valve designs, for many guitar players there really isn't anything like playing through an amp driven with pre- and power amp section full of valves. Most guitarists are happy to put up with the downsides of valve amps – their weight, perceived unreliability and continuing maintenance – because, at their best, they make you sound like your heroes.

Randall, though, has never shied away from the supposed poisoned chalice that solid-state amps are sometimes assumed to represent and, although we've mentioned this many times whenever this debate comes up, Dimebag Darrell's filthiest moments came courtesy of a Randall rig with not a valve in sight.

That said, the company's main designers Doug Reynolds and Bruce Egnater are certain that there's a tonal Grail out there that combines the best of the valve and tranny worlds and, with this V2, they reckon they've finally cracked it.

The key is a valve-driven Mosfet circuit that has been developed under the moniker Valve-Dynamic. The basic theory is that the valve itself provides the warmth, compression and authentic clipping characteristics, while the Mosfet components provide the power and headroom. The full story of the R&D process is described on Randall's main site, and we'll get to whether they succeeded when we plug the V2 in.

The head offers three channels that operate independently of each other and, what's more, they're served by different preamp sections. The Clean and Overdrive channels utilise a solid-state preamp, while switching to the

RANDALL V2	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

- **WE LIKED** Wealth of great rock tones; ease of use
- **WE DISLIKED** A remotely switchable boost function would have been marvellous

Valve OD option compels the amp itself to change internally to a preamp driven by a trio of 12AX7 valves. Remember that the signal from all three channels subsequently goes through the Mosfet circuits, themselves driven by a 12AT7 valve. Amplifier buffs will know that many Fender amps use 12AT7s as both phase inverter and reverb drivers, but a hybrid amp offering a total of four preamp valves is a first.

That would be enough for most, but the V2 also offers a number of other tone-tailoring features to hike the versatility stakes still higher. Although the Clean channel has no dedicated EQ to speak of – the other channels each have their own three-way sections – there's also a six-band graphic, ranging 12db either side of 80Hz to five kHz. The amp includes the rugged RF5V2, one function of which is to switch the graphic in and out at will. So, as a boost for solos or to add a certain something to any of the three channels, you're in the pound seats.

For the Valve OD there is a bright switch plus a selector for Tight and Loose options, while the solid-state

overdrive channel has a push/pull treble pot that triggers the amp's Sustain Boost function, which, as we'll discover, lights the blue touch paper.

There's also a master section comprising a volume, presence and density pots. In a nutshell, the latter controls the low end, although there's much more to it than simply doubling as a bass control, as we'll explain.

The footswitch is a MIDI-compatible unit and as well as allowing you to switch between the channels and activate the graphic, you can also kick the FX loop in and out and save certain channel-specific settings too.

We like the green/black livery of this and most other contemporary Randall amps a lot – there's nothing not to like about a backlit logo after all – and the V2 also features a semi-open chassis and, best of all, top-mounted handles.

There's really not a great deal more we could have asked for as far as the head's features go and we're perfectly happy with its construction.

**Pull the Sustain Boost pot and you'll be confronted with focussed and aggressive distortion that's just the ticket for fans of Hammett, Dimebag et al**

**SOUNDS:** This is where any amp such as this stands or falls and, with the Valve channel's gain set to around four, we're not at all shocked to be

able to report that the drive is full, warm and wholly useable. In fact we'd probably say that it's the most versatile of all here as regardless of how dirty you set it, it cleans up very efficiently when using your guitar volume. We did find that the bright switch wasn't especially necessary as it made the rock rhythm tone too harsh for our staid

**RANDALL V2**  
**PRICE:** £999  
**ORIGIN:** USA  
**TYPE:** Three channel, hybrid head  
**OUTPUT:** 400W RMS into 4 ohms  
**DIMENSIONS:** 270 (h) x 760 (w) x 260mm (d)  
**CABINET:** Birch ply  
**VALVES:** Three 12AX7 and one 12AT7  
**CHANNELS:** Three (clean, overdrive and valve OD) with dual preamps  
**CONTROLS:** Independent gain and level for each channel plus bass, middle and treble on overdrive and valve OD channels. Latter includes independent presence pot. Master section features master volume, presence and density pots  
**ADDITIONAL FEATURES:** MIDI-assignable six-band graphic, push/pull Sustain Boost feature, attack and bright switches on valve OD channel, channel select/store button, series or parallel FX loop, MIDI in and thru ports, XLR direct recording output, slave out  
**FOOTSWITCH:** RF5V2 five-way MIDI footswitch included  
**OPTIONS:** The two-channel T2 goes for £899 while the choice of 4 x 12 cabs starts with the Celestion Vintage 30-loaded RS412XL, at £699  
**Rock Solid Distribution**  
**01483 458822**  
**www.randallamplifiers.com**

RANDALL V2 £999

AMPLIFIERS  GUITARIST INTERACTIVE



The simple master section including Density adds to the amp's versatility



**Randall T2** £899

Featuring the same Valve-Dynamic technology and valve quartet, the T2 is a more streamlined version if you'd rather deal with three sounds and get on with it. The sound observations we've made within the V2 review go for this amp too, although there's no onboard graphic, sustain boost or similar options available here: there's no master volume either.

Still, this isn't to say that we don't like the T2 – because we do like it, very much. However, we remember debates

concerning the merits of a master volume Marshall JCM800 head when compared to the more complex TSL heads and we can empathise with players of a certain demeanour who find themselves much more comfortable when confronted with minimal switches and buttons. If that's you and you want that great Randall rock tone without too much tap-dancing required, then the T2 could well be the better option for you.

**Guitarist RATING** ★★★★★

**The rivals**

Marshall Mode Four	£510
Ashdown Fallen Angel	
Valve Pre 100H	£379
Laney LV300H	£229

The Mode Four is one of Marshall's greatest-ever innovations, boasting two channels each with their own independent and footswitchable modes. The power amp section reconfigures automatically to give a valve-like tone that rocks: hard. Ashdown's heavenly body includes a genuine valve preamp alongside 16 internal DSP effect contained within a 100-watt, two-channel head. With dual master volumes, an included four-way footswitch and boost options, this is a great option if the all-valve Fallen Angel is just too much. The very affordable LV300 head again offers an ECC83-loaded preamp with a 120-watt punch. Three channels, independent EQs and a surprisingly good tone makes this the amp to try if your budget is overly-restricted. Worth checking if you want a bargain too.

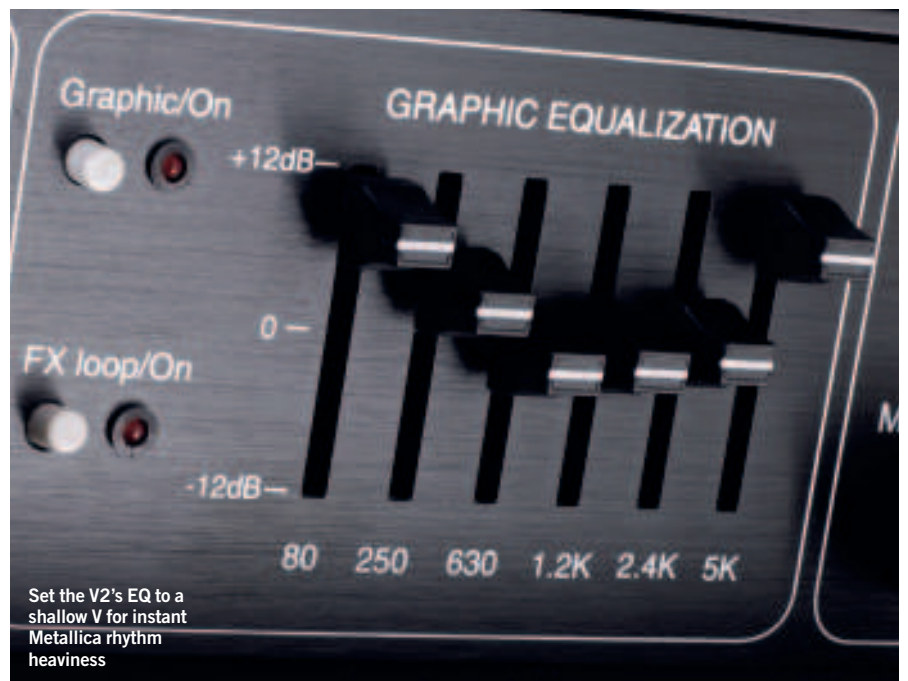
ears, but the attack switch is a godsend as it adds either tightness to metal riffs or swagger to rock styles with absolute ease.

For modern metal styles the wholly solid-state overdrive channel is where it's at. Pull the Sustain Boost pot and you'll be confronted with huge harmonics and a much more focussed and aggressive distortion that's just the ticket for fans of Kirk Hammett, Dimebag et al.

Don't turn the drive up too much, however, as the compression is just too overwhelming, but set the gain to around six, make sure the density control is adding enough low end without mushing up, and riff away with joy in your black heart of metal. For a really unsettlingly good experience, set the graphic to a shallow V and kick it in for instant Metallica. It's so easy, and sounds superb.

We weren't especially taken with the clean channel as it was a little too flat for our ears. It doesn't break up at all well with the gain all the way up and although the headroom is huge, we'd wager that this channel is the one we'd use the least out of the three. That said, with a touch of stompbox chorus to sweeten the tone, there's little more a rock fan will require here and, if your style is based around a non-dirty tone, Randall probably isn't really for you in the first place anyway.

The switchable graphic worked excellently for solo boosts when set in the right way and, if the Sustain Boost function could have also been controllable from the switch in real time rather than going through the channel store procedure, we'd have been in hog's heaven.




Set the V2's EQ to a shallow V for instant Metallica rhythm heaviness

**From restrained AC/DC-style blues tones all the way to neighbour-bothering Deicide-style roars, the V2 has it all – and for three figures, that's pretty impressive**

**Verdict**

As a fully-pro package that offers a wealth of rock, metal and nu tones without the price to match, the V2 has to be a frighteningly serious option. Don't be too concerned if the theory behind the inner workings of the Valve-Dynamic, dual-preamp innards don't overly excite you; simply know that the amp sounds wonderful, and that's the most important subject by far.

The clean channel wasn't so

inspiring, but the wealth of tones easily discovered within the Valve OD and Overdrive options will make any rock and metal fan more than happy. From restrained AC/DC-style blues tones all the way to neighbour-bothering Deicide-style roars, the V2 has it all and, for a three-figure price tag, that's pretty impressive. 

**Randall V2**

**Guitarist RATING** ★★★★★