

RANDALL RM100KH & KH120RHS £1,999 & £549  
GUITAR AMPS



PHOTOGRAPHY BY AMANDA THOMAS



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An American modular head and Chinese half-stack officially associated with Metallica's Kirk Hammett... *by Simon Bradley*

At the time of writing the latest Metallica opus, *Death Magnetic*, has just hit the streets to favourable reviews and, subsequently, interest in the quartet is at a five-year high. As well as the new music, we're equally enamoured to be able experience the complete range of Kirk Hammett amps from Randall that were launched in stages during this year.

Randall's head honcho Doug Reynolds explains how it happened: "I've been to Metallica HQ in San Francisco and it's loaded with just about every amp you can imagine; manufacturers just send 'em everything. We got lucky that [Anthrax guitarist] Scott Ian is a user and he's a close friend of Kirk. He said he was interested in exploring some new tones, so Scott offered to hook him up with us.

"David Karon, our A&R guy, was the first to talk to Kirk and I started modifying a bunch of our modules based on what we thought Kirk was looking for. We sent those for him to check out; they were fairly similar, just with a different voicing. Pretty much on the first try he loved one of them, so we started going back and forth at that point and it only took a couple of times to nail in the main tone, which is the KH2 [module]. We were probably in talks over a period of 10 to 12 months."

## RM100KH

This is the main US-made head that Kirk is using around Randall's innovative Modular design. As with all current modular heads in the catalogue, the RM100KH includes three specifically voiced preamp modules.

"We started with the KH2 and got talking about what other modules he wanted," explains

Reynolds. "For his clean sound he'd been using a bunch of Fenders over the years, so we started tweaking [one of] our Fender-style modules into more of a pseudo Blackface/Bassman combination. We went back and forth a couple of times on the clarity of the high-end before we got it right, but it's more Blackface than Tweed."

"There's never been a signature amp associated with Metallica and for the first to be us, it was just a great feather in our cap" *Doug Reynolds*



Each KH module is loaded with the same selection of controls

Randall also produces a number of signature and standard modules that each include a pair of 12AX7 tubes and are safely interchangeable by even the most ham-fisted individual. Merely unscrew a module from the chassis by hand and remove it, whereby you can slot – carefully – a new one into the gap. Check the video on this month's CD for exactly how to do this, but it really is as easy as pie.

"It is possible to switch various modules in and out, of course; they're all interchangeable," Reynolds assures us. "You can use the Hammett modules with the standard combos and heads too."

The burning question, then: why buy a Hammett head at all, when a standard RM100H is a cheaper option? The answer is

## The Rivals

### RM100KH

Engl's three-channel **Steve Morse 100** (£2,100) positively overruns with controls and is almost too involved for many of us, but it certainly does sound very special indeed, while **Hughes & Kettner's Alex Lifeson signature Triamp** (£2,139) offers six differently voiced channels in a slightly more straightforward manner. Satch's **Peavey JSX** (£1,299) head is full of high gain and versatility, and if you're after something more streamlined, Marshall's single-channel and brutal 2203KK (£849) is just the thing: beware The Beast!



There's a ton of musical low-end push, as you'd expect, and even with the middle pot set to half, the tone is perfectly suited to muted chords and staccato notes

### The Rivals

#### KH120RHS

**Marshall's MG100HDFX** (£249) and 412 cab (£225) offers all manner of digital effects, lines in and out, plus an almost unbelievable level of low-end, high gain push. The excellently priced **Laney LX120RH** 120-watt head (£189) and LS412 cab (£229) also includes a selection of DSP effects plus plenty of headroom. For even more metal at a slightly higher spec, we're genuine fans of **Fender's** three-channel, 400-watt **Metalhead MH-500** (£829) and 412 cab (£629). It is a particularly aptly named stack.

that if you want the exact Hammett tone, you will need the RM100KH as its power section is slightly different.

"When I actually got with him face-to-face and took a day to dial in all the modules to get the amp where he wanted it with the cabinets he was using, I did end up beefing up the power section just a little bit," confirms Reynolds. "It was just one capacitor changed to let more sub low-end through."

The power section includes a quartet of Slovakian JJ 6L6GC valves plus a trio of ECC83S bottles that, in order, represent the first gain stage of the preamp section, a valve buffer for both effects loops, and a phase inverter.

Also included is a three-way Randall footswitch to select the modules, and we reckon the provision of chicken-head knobs

and lettering – in Kirk's own hand, no less – adds a great deal to the whole vibe.

### Sounds

Before we plugged in, we asked Doug to address the issue of Kirk's use of active EMG pickups with his glut of ESP guitars. Will using passive coils affect the authenticity of the tone at all?

"That doesn't really matter with the high-gain modules but, with the clean module, absolutely. Obviously the active pickups hit the front end a lot harder so we had to pad down the front end a little bit so it'd stay nice and clean at higher volumes."

For the majority of the sound testing we used an EMG-equipped ESP KH-3, with our trusty Seymour Duncan-loaded ESP GL-56 on standby. As a starting point we set all module pots to noon, which was especially helpful in illustrating that the tone from the KH2 is slightly darker – almost more 'squashy' – in nature than that of KH3. Once you dial more suitable settings, the crunch from KH2 is indeed the rhythm sound most Metallica fans will be

familiar with. There's a ton of musical low-end push, as you'd expect, and even with the middle pot set to half, the tone is perfectly suited to muted chords and staccato notes.

KH3 would be perfect for solo work as it's certainly hotter to our ears and, subsequently, offers more cut if required, but there would be nothing stopping you from reversing the utilisation of the two: using the KH2 with the neck EMG caused walls to shake!

Proceedings can become slightly mushy due to the sheer level of gain compression but, by balancing the master presence and density controls (the latter allows you to regulate the low-mid 'feel' of the overdrive), any loss of clarity can be quickly counteracted to give a most triumphant roar. Each module also has a bright switch for an additional and subtle treble hike when required.

In contrast the clean KH1 module certainly does have plenty of Fender-y character, with that unmistakable attack at the beginning of the note adding to a tone full of chime and shimmer. Add the merest touch of reverb, and you have a clean tone that many players, regardless of musical genre, would be proud of.

### KH120RHS

The range also includes this Chinese-built solid-state head, and this diversity of products was something Hammett himself was very keen on. "We wanted him to do it because that's where we move a lot of amps and we expect that's the product the younger Metallica fan is able to afford right off the bat," states Reynolds. "Kirk too said that he wanted to do something the kids could afford."



The Density control acts as a master low-mid control: think of it as thump!



The font used on the front panel is designed from Kirk's own handwriting

This head also includes a bespoke 412 cabinet at the competitive price of £549 and is of a more traditional design: there's no provision for either modules or, indeed, valves of any kind.

"The KH120RH is basically a somewhat non-modular version," says Reynolds. "We tried to keep the EQ voicing the same so it'd kind of feel like the bigger head; it'd have the same sweepability that the modules have in them."

The head's two channels include a trio of modes loosely based round the three KH modules, with the overdrive channel boasting a switchable gain boost for the third tone. Also included is a spring reverb, a headphone output for silent riffing, and a stereo CD input.

Lurking within the cab are four Celestion Rocket 50 12-inch speakers, and the box is a straight up and down affair that certainly looks the part.

### Sounds

The three tonal options here do mirror those of the full-on RM100KH, but are hardly of a similar aural quality. The amount of drive from both gain 1 and gain 2 is very satisfying for both rhythm and lead and, with some tinkering of the EQ, you can just about obtain two distinct sounds. Once again, balancing the EQ with the contour pot is important, although you are obliged to set the same output level for each.

Clean the amp is perfectly adequate considering the price point, although the reverb tends to be overly woofy if dialled too high. That said, you can crunch the channel up should you desire by upping the gain so there is a modicum of versatility on offer even here.



A quartet of Slovakian grunt bottles

### Verdict

"It's great for us," Doug Reynolds enthuses. "There's never been a signature amp associated with Metallica and for the first to be us, it was just a great feather in our cap. It was a lot of luck and the right combination of contacts, but Kirk was really intrigued by the modular concept and appreciates what we're doing."

He's justifiably proud as the RM100KH is a high-class and very toneful amp. As ever, you're not required to be a Hammett fan to own and use an example, but there's probably little point in undertaking the financial outlay if you're not.

Conversely the much more affordable KH120RHS half-stack would represent a great first step towards any budding metal player's own signature tone, even though it's not as hugely impressive tonally in this exalted company.

You could truly use the RM100KH, with the added versatility afforded by the myriad models available, for virtually all applications: an amp worthy of the man and his band... **G**

### The Bottom Line

#### Randall RM100KH

**We like:** The quality of the clean module; authenticity of the crunch tones; modular structure

**We dislike:** Aside from the price tag, nothing

**Guitarist says:** It's rare that head-turning clean and ultra-crunch tones are available from a single head, but that's certainly the case here. If you love Metallica, do all you (legally!) can to get hold of one

#### Randall KH120RHS

**We like:** Solid performance; loads of gain and low-end thrust; ideal for a first gigging rock amp rig

**We dislike:** The clean tone and over-zealous reverb left us a tad flat; the two gain options aren't hugely different either

**Guitarist says:** A great price for a signature head and cab, plus a choice of useable and very dirty tones. A career in metal awaits...



### Randall RM100KH

**PRICE:** £1,999

**ORIGIN:** USA

**TYPE:** Signature, all-tube, modular head

**OUTPUT:** 100 watts

**VALVES:** 4 x JJ 6L6GC and 3 x ECC83S, and the KH1, KH2 and KH3 modular preamps, each including two 12AX7 tubes

**CABINET:** 20mm birch plywood

**DIMENSIONS:** 614 (w) x 286 (h) x 254mm (d)

**CHANNELS:** Three

**CONTROLS:** Each KH module has the same controls: bass, middle, treble, gain and volume, plus a bright micro switch.

Master controls comprise volume, presence density and effects mix

**FOOTSWITCH:** Supplied RF3 MIDI footswitch

**ADDITIONAL FEATURES:** Series and parallel FX loops, MIDI in and thru ports, plus a Tube Bias section for each 6L6

**OPTIONS:** Choose from either the RS412KHX or RS412KH100 (both £899) 4 x 12 cabinets. Each offers different speaker configurations and both are equipped with 'Mic Eliminator' XLR outputs

**RANGE OPTIONS:** As well as the KH120RHS, there's the very cute KH15 (£59) practice amp and the ultra-cool and very limited flamed maple KH-LTD, yours for £7,999! The standard RM100 range of heads begins at £899, with modules available from £199. The Hammett modules are £259 each

**Sound Technology 01462 480000**  
[www.randallamplifiers.com](http://www.randallamplifiers.com)



### Test results

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

**GUITARIST RATING** ★★★★★



### Randall KH120RHS

**PRICE:** £549 for head and cab

**ORIGIN:** China

**TYPE:** Signature, solid-state head

**OUTPUT:** 120 watts

**VALVES:** N/A

**CABINET:** 19mm particleboard

**DIMENSIONS:** 620 (w) x 252 (h) x 243mm (d)

**CHANNELS:** Two, with three modes

**CONTROLS:** Clean channel – bass, middle, treble and volume. Overdrive channel – gain 1, gain 2, bass, middle, treble, contour and volume. Master volume, reverb level

**FOOTSWITCH:** Supplied

**ADDITIONAL FEATURES:** Gain select and channel buttons, series FX loop, spring reverb, headphone output, left and right CD inputs, mono FX loop

### Randall KH120S Cab

**POWER:** 200 watts RMS

**SPEAKERS:** Four 12-inch Celestion Rocket 50s

**CABINET:** 19mm particleboard

**ADDITIONAL FEATURES:** Castors and recessed handles

### Test results

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

**GUITARIST RATING** ★★★★★