



Orange Rockerverb RK50C MkII & RK50H MkII £1,399 & £1,299

The dirtiest amps in the Orange range get a few extra tweaks for 2010 *by Chris Vinnicombe*

Guitarist first came across Orange's Rockerverb series when it was launched back in 2004. In issue 253 we heaped praise on the 50- and 100-watt heads and the 50-watt combo, and since then Rockerverbs have graced some of the world's biggest stages.

Earlier this year, Orange unveiled new MkII Rockerverb amps. So what's changed? "The idea behind the MkII was to improve on what we already had," explains designer Adrian Emsley. "6V6 output valves are no longer being made to be the same as they once were. The current versions that sound close to the originals aren't very reliable and the JJ versions, which are reliable, don't really sound like a 6V6.

"For this reason, we changed the 50-watt Rockerverb MkII to run on a pair of EL34s instead. Other improvements to the MkII versions are to the FX loop, which is now 10 times more transparent. We also added a middle control to the

clean channel. The dirty channel remains unchanged because many players already liked what it did on the previous Rockerverb 50s and 100s."

It seems reasonable to expect a harder-edged, more 'British' tonality from the 50 now it comes equipped with EL34 power valves. However, if that's not to your taste, then both the head and combo now feature the same output valve selection switch that graces the Rockerverb 100, should you wish to replace the factory EL34s with KT88s or 6L6s for a slightly different flavour.

The other big change on the combos is that the main control panel now resides on the front of the amplifier, rather than the prior AC30-style configuration. If you prefer your amps to sit at floor-level then this might make on-the-fly tweaking a bit awkward. However, if you use an amp stand or flightcase to raise your amp up closer to ear-level it should now be easier to see what's going on at a glance.

As we've come to expect, these amps are seriously well built. If cockroaches and Keith Richards really are all that will be left crawling around after the apocalypse, then when The Human Riff and his insect buddies inevitably decide to form a band, they'll be playing Orange. Seriously though, this writer has gigged, rehearsed and recorded with Orange amps for nigh on a decade now and has never had a moment's trouble, apart from that of the spinal variety when the time comes to haul the things up three flights of stairs for soundcheck. Oh, for a roadie.

Sounds

Physical heaviness aside, these amps have more gain than any others in the Orange range, so we're expecting no shortage of sonic weight either. Plugged in, both head and combo are absolute beasts. The switch to EL34s seems to have added aggression to an already ferocious slab of backline, so we

The rivals

Blackstar's Series One S1-45 combo (£899) won a Gold Award in issue 318 and has character and versatility in abundance. **Mesa/Boogie** recently updated its 100-watt **Dual Rectifier** head and won a Gold Award in the process. £2,329 is a lot more cash, but as twin-channel high gain rock and metal amps go, this is the benchmark. Finally, if it's 50 British watts and EL34s that you want, check out **Marshall's JVM** series (from £830).

strap on a Gibson Les Paul and put it to the test.

In isolation, the clean channel's lack of master volume makes the experience very much like using an old single-channel non-master volume amp. As you wind up the level, an old-school overdrive emerges that moves through Brit pop and late sixties blues territory into Zeppelin riff rock and beyond. At stage volume, you won't get much in the way of crystalline country twang here, even with vintage-voiced

single-coils, but there's great raunch for power pop rhythms and the cavernous valve-driven reverb (even deeper in the case of the combo thanks to its longer tray) will give Peter Green fans a hazy fug to sink into. The addition of a middle control makes an already versatile channel even more flexible and either amp would score highly with us were they just based around this fantastic clean channel.

Flipping to the dirty channel, we're definitely not in the sixties or seventies anymore. At lower gain levels, harmonically rich GN'R-style crunch is perfect for hard rocking, but wind the gain up past two o'clock and it's all about the dirt; with swathes and swathes of juicy, musical distortion. Both head and combo can certainly manage the heavier end of the Foo Fighters through to early eighties Metallica and drop-tuned stoner rock riffing, but with Celestion Vintage 30s in your 4 x 12 and high-output pickups in your axe, the head easily has the balls for Lamb Of God-style metal sounds.

All Orange valve amps tend to have mid-heavy, warm voices, and this is no exception. Even with the mid control backed



The Rockerverb's dirty channel offers plenty of thick metal distortion

right off there's not much scope for a totally scooped-out early nineties metal sound without additional EQ, but that's rarely in vogue these days anyway. Most players now realise that when it comes to cutting through, mids rule. Indeed, mid-rich, sustaining lead notes hang on for days and bloom into controllable feedback with satisfying ease.

If you think a 112 combo isn't enough spread, think again. The combo's ported-back construction throws out enough sound to easily dominate a club stage, and for monitoring purposes it's much less laser-like and directional

than, for instance, a closed-back Marshall 4 x 12 can be.

While the combo is probably the sensible choice for non-metalheads, prospective buyers of the head should note that with the volume and gain maxed out, while the output level is massive, proceedings can get a little mushy and lose definition through more vintage-voiced drivers, and it's hard to set the clean channel up to be loud enough to compete with it and retain cleanliness. That'll be where the additional headroom of the 100-watt version comes in then...

Verdict

Orange has taken an already successful design and added updates that make perfect sense. If you play alternative rock, retro blues-rock, power pop or full-on metal and are looking for a well-behaved pro-level head or combo built to withstand years of heavy road use, the MkII Rockerverbs have to be on your must-try list. There's more competition out there now than there was when the first Rockerverbs arrived in 2004, but these Brit-built monsters still punch harder than most. **G**

The Bottom Line

We like: Built for world tours and festival stages; great range of top-drawer rock sounds

We dislike: Are the combo's aesthetics retro-cool or just plain dated? Your choice...

Guitarist says: Upgrades make these already excellent amps even more desirable

Orange Rockerverb RK50C 112 combo & RK50H head

PRICE: £1,399 & £1,299

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: All-valve, two-channel Class AB combo and head with solid-state rectification

OUTPUT: 50 watts RMS

VALVES: Two EL34 power valves; four ECC81/12AT7, three ECC83/12AX7 preamp

DIMENSIONS: Combo: 660 (w) x 540 (h) x 300mm (d); head: 550 (w) x 240 (h) x 280mm (d)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): Combo: 37/81; head: 20/44

CABINET: 18mm marine birch ply

LOUDSPEAKER: One 12-inch Celestion Vintage 30 (combo)

CHANNELS: Two

CONTROLS: Clean channel volume, treble, middle, bass. Dirty channel gain, volume, treble, middle, bass. Reverb level

CONNECTIONS: FX send and return, footswitch outs for channel and reverb, two 8-ohm and one 16-ohm speaker outs

FOOTSWITCH: Standard latching (not supplied) changes channels and toggles reverb

ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Long-tray spring reverb (combo); short-tray spring reverb (head)

RANGE OPTIONS: RK100H MkII 100-watt head is £1,449, RK50C MkII 212 combo is £1,549

OMEC

0208 905 2828

www.orangeamps.com

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Either of the two amps would score highly with us were they just based around this fantastic clean channel

