

VS

Words: Henry Yates

YAMAHA THR10 FENDER G-DEC 3 FIFTEEN

This month, it's a pocket-rocket shootout between two compact amps with big ideas. TG decides which one is practice made perfect...

HERE at TG, we remember the years of the Bad Practice Amp. Typically used in tandem with the Lame First Electric, this puny combo was only visible under a microscope, had just one button (for power), and such a feeble output that it couldn't wake your sleeping grandparents. You tolerated it because black-and-white economics meant you had to, but when you finally graduated to a proper amp you'd take a vengeful pleasure in beating this pretender to a smoking pulp and launching the scrap off the side of a ferry.

Still, that was then, and if proof is needed of how far the sector has come then it's provided by Yamaha's THR10 (£299) and Fender's G-DEC 3 Fifteen (£274). Flick through the spec material

and you'll be left in little doubt that these compact combos are serious artillery. While the unofficial target audience for practice combos has traditionally been skint novices, these backstage bruisers hijack the concept and make it feasible for professionals. They now come with useful power ratings, stacks of tone-shaping capability, amp/FX models to burn, backing tracks and USB connectivity to assist in editing and recording.

Both contenders hail from big-name manufacturers, and both of them weigh in at the same ultra-competitive price point. But with only one gold medal up for grabs, this could be the biggest featherweight dust-up since Mini-Me spilt Nick Nack's pint...







AT A GLANCE
TYPE: Solid-state modelling amp
OUTPUT: 10 watts
SPEAKER: 2x full-range speakers
CONTROLS: Amp, gain, master, bass, mid, treble, 2x effect, guitar/aux output level, tap/tuner
SOCKETS: Input, aux, headphones, power, USB
WEIGHT: 2.8kg
DIMENSIONS: [HxWxD] 183x360x140mm
CONTACT: Yamaha 0844 811 1116 www.uk.yamaha.com

YAMAHA THR10 **£299**

Style meets substance in Yamaha's backstage beauty

IT CAN sometimes feel like there's a conspiracy between designers to make all practice amps squat, stubby and sexless. If so, nobody told the Yamaha boys, who have turned in a combo with more visual va-va-voom than one of their motorbikes. Marketed as a 'third amp' to coexist alongside your stage stack and mid-sized rehearsal-room combo, the THR10's cosmetic vibe sits somewhere between a boutique valve head and a wartime radio.

While some 'compact' amps don't feel that way after three flights of stairs, its lunchbox dimensions, 2.8kg weight and a battery-power option make it genuinely portable. Fire up the THR10 and the front grille glows orange, causing TG to break out a tin opener to search for genuine valves. Yamaha is toying with us, of course – this unit is 100 per cent solid state. But the Japanese firm does promise game-changing amp modelling from the THR10's onboard simulations, powered by Virtual Circuitry

Modeling (VCM) technology which it claims can nail the dynamic response of valve-driven preamps and power sections. There's a sense of quality over quantity with the THR10. You've got a total of five amp models (plus bass/acoustic models) and eight effects. Everything is tweakable via a three-band EQ and separate Gain and Master controls, plus you can push the parameters further still using the THR Editor (on your computer). Throw in the option of recording and editing material using the included Cubase AI software, plus the ability to jam along with audio files from external sources, and this amp has plenty of tricks for £299. That said, it really all hinges on the THR10's sound quality. While Yamaha's amp simulations are generally impressive, they're not exactly head and shoulders above the modelling pack. It might have been nice if Yamaha had included a truly insane setting to satisfy the metallers too. For its looks, convenience and superior sound quality, the Yamaha THR10 has one foot on the podium. But only a fool would bet against the mighty Fender.



The THR10 is a vintage-style beauty...

SUMMARY	FEATURES	■ ■ ■ ■ ■
	SOUND QUALITY	■ ■ ■ ■ ■
	VALUE FOR MONEY	■ ■ ■ ■ ■
	BUILD QUALITY	■ ■ ■ ■ ■
	USEABILITY	■ ■ ■ ■ ■
OVERALL RATING	★★★★★	



AT A GLANCE
TYPE: Solid-state modelling amp
OUTPUT: 15 watts
SPEAKER: 8-inch Special Design
CONTROLS: Guitar tone, band level, volume, tap/tuner, backing track start/stop, 4x preset parameters, preset selector, looper controls, save, exit, power
SOCKETS: Guitar input, SD card input, headphones, USB, footswitch, aux
WEIGHT: 9.7kg
DIMENSIONS: [HxWxD] 350x380x180mm
CONTACT: Fender GBI 01342 331700 www.fender.co.uk



FENDER G-DEC 3 FIFTEEN £274

The fun factor swings it for Fender



LAST month, the G-DEC Junior proved more fun than Slash's stag night in our Group Test, so we have high hopes for its big brother: a 15-watt bruiser that piles on the amp models, digital FX, rocket fuel and celebrity stardust.

It wasn't love at first sight with the Fifteen. With the THR10 still fresh in our memory, this amp looks dull, feels cumbersome at 9.7kg and ties you to the plug socket with no battery option. Plus, we felt it skimmed a little on tone knobs, with just one dial for your guitar sound, and none of the dovetailing volume controls that made the Yamaha feel like an authentic valve amp.

Still, in every other sense the Fifteen is absolutely chock-full of black magic. In contrast to the THR10, whose handful of high-quality models gave it a grown-up air, the Fifteen is a laugh-a-minute thrill ride that's more fun to hang out with than actual flesh-and-blood bandmates.

For most players, the first stop will be a spin through the presets: 100 ready-made sonic *amuse-bouches* built up from amp models and virtual stompboxes,

and offering everything from a modern Mesa/Boogie-style grind to the cloth-and-sawdust twang of a Bassman. The real bonus is that for each preset, there's a corresponding backing track. These are often created by the likes of John 5 and Anthrax, and therefore nothing like the cheesy jams you're probably imagining.

The Fifteen sounds incredible, with a useful 15-watt grunt, a quality loudspeaker and amp models that are dead-on realistic. If you want to go deeper, editing

and recording are feasible via the bundled Fuse editor and Ableton software, and storage is intuitive with an SD card. Don't be fooled: this is a serious amp. It just so happens to be an absolute riot.

Both amps knocked us out, and prompted a genuine dilemma. The critical question is: which one would we rather find in our dressing room next to a chilled lager? And for its sense of immediacy, its fun factor, its increased power and its price, the answer has to be the Fifteen.

SUMMARY	FEATURES	■■■■■
	SOUND QUALITY	■■■■■
	VALUE FOR MONEY	■■■■■
	BUILD QUALITY	■■■■■
	USEABILITY	■■■■■
OVERALL RATING	★★★★★	



...But the Fifteen has more beneath its bonnet