

Words: Henry Yates

VOX NIGHT TRAIN 50 VS EGNATER TWEAKER-40

Two heads are better than one, and this month, TG rates two downsized stacks that prove valve amps needn't be minimalist or back-breaking

THESE are testing times for the Massive Amp Stack. From the pub slogger with his mic'd combo, to Misha Mansoor of Periphery, who this month reminds TG that his Fractal Axe-Fx lets him play Wembley Arena sans backline, it seems like the world is getting smaller, slimmer and more like the chihuahua in Paris Hilton's handbag. If this trend continues, thousands of obsolete roadies will have to be released into the community...

As such, with this Head To Head, we haven't gone king-sized with enormo-heads and 4x12 wardrobes, but instead lined up two tweakable and giggable heads twinned to 2x12 cabs that won't slip your disc, shred

your overdraft or spare your audience (don't be fooled by their feeble-sounding wattage: a 50-watt amp produces nearly as many decibels as a 100-watt one). And while most valve heads limit their dial-count to the bare bones, it's worth noting that both these rivals put an emphasis on tweakability.

First up, we're on the Night Train 50 (£659; £419 for V212NT cab): a beefed-up reboot of the original Vox mini-heads that throws more tone-shaping features into the mix. Less of a known quantity is the Egnater Tweaker-40 (£529; £429 for 212X cab), but if it's anything like the previous work of tone guru Bruce Egnater, it should take the British legends right to the wire...









HEAD TO HEAD PORTABLE GIGGING HEADS



while the Vox flagship will always be the AC30, the Night Train has run it close in the modern era, and with the 50 we're travelling first-class. Obviously,

AT A GLANCE

TYPE: Valve head

OUTPUT: 50 watts

VALVES: 4x 12 A X 7 (preamp)

CONTROLS: Standby, Power,

Channel Select, Master Volume,

SOCKETS: Speaker jacks, FX Loop

Tone Cut, Gain and 3-band EQ

and Send/Return, Footswitch

DIMENSIONS: [HxWxD] 235 x

CONTACT: Korg UK 01908

857101 www.voxamps.co.uk

and 2x EL34 (power amp)

Thick, Tight, Bright/Girth

for each channel

(VFS2A not supplied)

WEIGHT: 12.2kg

458 x 175-mm

that figure denotes the uprated grunt (quite a jump from the two/15 watts of its lunchbox brethren), while there's a spread of four 12AX7 and two EL34 valves glowing behind that steel grille.

Vox is keen to push the versatility of this head – "blues one night, country after that and full-on rock the next!" – and that's backed up by a dashboard that offers far more to fiddle than before. Twin channels, with the overdrive comically

known as 'Girth', are individually tone-shapeable and theoretically footswitchable if you cough up for the VFS2A, while there's also a few secret weapons that we'll get to in a moment. Have the old guard realised that people demand more than one killer tone?

Physically, it's mostly good news. The NT50 has slightly

exposed knobs, but looks like the world's most rocking cat-carrier, is light enough for practical gigging and turns out to be intuitive, too, with LEDs denoting which channel you're on. As you'd hope from the British sparkle kings, the 'Bright' channel is suitably ethereal, with good headroom before things start to roughen round the edges, but the real thrill comes from activating

the 'Thick' preamp

mode and being boosted through the roof to a tight, woody, hard-driving crunch (the only frustration is that it stops the EQ dials working). Like most valve amps, the Night Train lays sloppy playing a bit bare, but Vox has thoughtfully added an FX loop around the tradesman's entrance.

As for 'Girth', well, it's as fat as it sounds. Vox is still Vox, and classic rock-style gain is still the forte over truly seething metal tones, but if that's your vibe, you'll love the thick, roaring swagger that pumps through those 12-inch Celestions. It's a quality tone that doesn't require you to hunch over the dials, but the 'Tight' switch is a cool addition, too. Playing solo, we preferred to keep it disengaged

for a full-on sensory assault, but cutting the low-end boom in a band situation will doubtless have its uses, while the Tone Cut does the same sort of job for the highs.

The Night Train 50 is the kind of amp you'd have when playing a pub gig in heaven. It offers modern looks, killer tones, trimmings that make a difference... and did we mention that it's seriously loud? If there's a misconception that Vox is all about The Beatles shaking their heads and going 'woo!' back in the 60s, then this modern monster will bury them. It's hard to see how the Egnater will top it.





amp guru Bruce Egnater might not have the back story or artist roster of Vox, but he's piled up the plaudits with the original Tweaker and reckons this one is

AT A GLANCE

TYPE: All-valve head

OUTPUT: 40-watts

2x 6L6 (power amp)

VALVES: 3x 12AX7 (preamp),

CONTROLS: Power, Standby, Channel

Master Volume, Gain, Tight/Deep, Hot/

Clean, Bright/Normal, Mid Cut/Normal

SOCKETS: Speaker jacks, Footswitch

01912 611568 www.egnateramps.com

Select, Brit/AC/USA tone switch.

3-band EQ, and for each channel:

switches, Impedance switch

(supplied), Effects Send/Return

DIMENSIONS: [HxWxD] 182 x

CONTACT: Guitar Guitar

WEIGHT: 9.9kg

470 x 206mm

more powerful, more toneful, "the ultimate gigging amp", no less. The Tweaker-40 is all about dialling up your ultimate sound, and weirdly, rather than force punters into the time-honoured choice of clean or gain, this head's two channels start off identical and let you decide where they end up. It's either a refreshing blank canvas or a slight cop-out: we'll let you know.

Next to the Night Train, the

Tweaker-40 has a slightly divisive laundry-basket vibe, but the dials are less prone to get smashed off, and it's also a couple of kilos lighter (to be fair, it's also 10 watts less powerful). It's worth noting that despite shaving £120 off the Vox's asking price, you even get the footswitch thrown in, which is a pretty cool sweetener

given the whole channel-jumping philosophy. With a great tone performance, this amp could steal it.

Let's plug into channel '1' and commence the tweakathon, If you're a modelling fan, your first stop will undoubtedly be the nubbin next to the EQ, which gives the choice of three tone control circuits: 'US' (which delivers a great Fender-ish roar), 'Brit' (a brilliant, boomy Marshall-esque

bark) and 'AC' (which is a good Vox approximation, though admittedly a bit pale-sounding next to the real thing). We love the Vintage/

Modern switch, too, and especially the tight, aggressive tone of the latter. And so it continues. By each Gain control, you've got a cluster of four more subtle fine-tuning switches. There isn't room to cover all the tones, suffice to say that selecting 'Hot' and 'Tight' creates a seriously stinging high-gain voice for lead, no doubt helped along by the 6L6 power tubes for a generally more 'American' feel.

So, yeah, the Tweaker-40 is seriously tweakable, and it's possible to create a twin-channel assault that's either chalk-andcheese or merely subtly different. With all that said, given that there are dedicated Gain and Volume dials for each channel, it seems weird that a single three-band EQ is left to tailor both sides. On a more subjective note, we don't feel the cleaner tones have quite the same cobweb-blasting sparkle as the Vox, and while 10 watts of power probably isn't a deal-breaker, the NT50 does feel like it's got a bit more poke in reserve.

It's the tightest of showdowns between two killer amps – but for its shimmer, snarl, power and stage presence, we've got to get onboard the Night Train.

