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BLACKSTAR ID:CORE BEAM £229  
AMPS



# BEAM TICKET

The latest addition to the ID:Core line shrinks the dimensions and adds Bluetooth music playback, plus acoustic and bass models - BEAM us up...

WORDS **Michael Brown** PHOTOGRAPHY **Joby Sessions**





# Blackstar ID:Core BEAM

## What You Need To Know About

- 1 What's the idea here?**  
The BEAM is a compact tabletop entry in the ID:Core line, but offers Bluetooth music streaming, plus acoustic and bass voicings.
- 2 So, I can play all types of guitars through this?**  
You can: Blackstar has included two acoustic, two bass and two acoustic simulations into the ID:Core recipe here.
- 3 Why the Bluetooth?**  
The Bluetooth is there to let you wirelessly stream music from your phone or computer so you can jam along with your tunes.

Increasingly, compact combos are becoming much more than just low-volume amps. Since the advent of Yamaha's THR series and its 'third amp' concept in 2011, tabletop amps with full-range speakers are becoming commonplace, and they're just as at home playing music from your phone as they are notes from your guitar. Last year, Blackstar's ID:Core series brought full-range speakers to a traditional compact combo outline – but the BEAM takes it to an even more living room-friendly level.

BEAM stands for Bass Electric Acoustic Music – the first three letters represent the types of guitar you can plug in, while the latter refers to the unit's Bluetooth capabilities, which allows you to play music

wirelessly from phone or tablet. With a more compact enclosure than its ID:Core siblings (291 x 169 x 166mm as opposed to the Stereo 10's 340 x 265 x 185mm), and a pair of three-inch speakers, the BEAM is designed to sit comfortably on a tabletop,

too, with acoustically tuned designs to usurp your current desktop speaker setup. It's also durable enough to chuck in a bag for occasional jam sessions, thanks to a reassuringly chunky particleboard construction and smart-looking grille cloth, while







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The BEAM has 12 voices spanning three instruments



Bluetooth means the BEAM streams music wirelessly



Controls are basic, but they can be fine-tweaked on computer

the recessed plastic control panel and knobs feel like they can withstand a knock or two. The unit's weight is kept down by the use of an external laptop-style power supply.

In terms of catering for extra instruments, Blackstar has expanded the original ID:Core's six electric voices (two clean, two crunch, two distorted), and added two acoustic and bass voices apiece, as well as two acoustic sims for electrics, all of which are accessed by pressing the voice control. That's in addition to the bevy of effects (four delays, four reverbs, four modulations) selected using a four-way rotary selector and trio of buttons, with speed adjusted via a tap tempo button. You can save sounds to any of the 12 available onboard presets and easily switch between them

using the optional FS-11 ID:Core Footcontroller.

Elsewhere, Blackstar's hallmark ISF control functions as the lone tone control on the top panel, adjusting between British mids and American muscle. These tones can be further adjusted by hooking the BEAM up to your computer via USB and tweaking hidden parameters using Blackstar's free Insider software. What's more, the USB connection also functions as an interface for direct recording with your DAW, and even re-amping a pre-recorded dry guitar signal. Finally, a pair of 3.5mm sockets offer headphone outputs and a line in for audio devices. As with previous ID:Core offerings, it's a sleek, uncomplicated control panel, which allows you to get straight to the point: playing.

## Sounds

If you've used any of Blackstar's previous ID:Core offerings, you know what to expect here. Starting at the lower end of the gain spectrum, the cleans are sweet and Tweed-y, and retain their warmth even when things get treble-heavy on the Clean Bright setting. Working your way up, it's clear that the BEAM is most at home with the crunch voices, which are highly touch-responsive across gain levels, from a glassy Plexi-ish break-up to a compressed, boosted overdrive channel-type sound.

The two OD settings, meanwhile, provide a decent enough chug, with more than enough gain to get your 80s virtuoso juices flowing, but you may find your notes cut a little prematurely owing to the somewhat over-excitable noise gate. It's here that the limitations of the sole ISF control rear their head, too: when turned fully right (ie, maximum British), the low frequencies have a tendency to

## The Rivals

The **Line 6 AMPLiFi TT** (£149) requires separate speakers, but also features Bluetooth, as well as its own app and tone matching for your music.

**Yamaha's** ever-popular **THR10** (£280) doesn't offer wireless playback, but is a similarly spec'd twin-speaker desktop amp, while the **IK Multimedia iLoud** (£239) is a dedicated Bluetooth speaker with built-in iRig circuit for use with iOS devices running AmpliTube

The BEAM is most at home with the crunch voices, which are highly touch-responsive across gain levels

take over, and while some tinkering on the Insider software remedies that, an extra tone control wouldn't have gone amiss on the top panel.

Less tweaking is required with the excellent assortment of effects, which are all pedal-worthy. Blackstar's Super Wide Stereo tech is also present in the BEAM – it makes your guitar sound as if it's coming from







The onboard effects are very impressive

There's no better demonstration of the Super Wide Stereo's ear-bending magic than the amp's built-in effects

either side of the speakers, and there's no better demonstration of its ear-bending magic than the amp's effects. The modulation section comprises phaser, flanger, chorus and tremolo, all of which swirl around the stereo field. Adding in one of the four vintage-voiced delays (linear, analogue, tape, multi) only emphasises the effect further, while the four reverb types provide an ambience you won't find short of running a stereo reverb pedal into two amps.

Switching over to the new settings, we were pleased to note acoustic sims for both single coils and humbuckers. As you might expect, the softer, subtler single-coil sim was the more convincing, and while neither voice is going to have you ditching your dreadnought, they're more than passable as

providers of percussive flavour in a song mix. The acoustic side of proceedings, meanwhile, is effective. You get two flavours: one with a flat response for preamp-equipped acoustics and another more hi-fi sound, like a traditional acoustic amp. While the former is fine for unaffected sonic reproduction, the latter really sings, especially with a generous helping of reverb, although you'll need to watch the high-end with piezo-loaded acoustics.

The bass voices offer a similar choice of fairly flat and more hi-fi sounds, and thanks to the BEAM's ported construction, serve up plenty of punch for low-volume playing. Blackstar has also reconfigured the effects line-up for bass voices, replacing the four reverb types with four blendable drives, while an envelope filter takes

the place of the guitar's tremolo. These effects – particularly the gnarly, gated fuzz sound on the drive dial – sound great on guitar, too, so they're well worth experimenting with.

### Verdict

With sound quality that capably competes with similarly priced speaker systems and no-fuss Bluetooth music-streaming capabilities, the BEAM is a no-brainer, particularly if you're a player who does a bit of everything. There's enough volume here to fuel living room get-togethers and impromptu jam sessions, while the recording capabilities make getting quick demos together easy, too. While it doesn't offer the same range of sounds as, say, Line 6's AMPLIFi TT, it's simple to dial in a great tone without much tinkering, which gets you playing more – and thanks to Bluetooth, jamming along with your music more, too. And at this price, that's something well worth investing in. **G**



### Blackstar ID:Core BEAM

**PRICE:** £229  
**ORIGIN:** China  
**TYPE:** Bluetooth-enabled desktop modelling amp  
**OUTPUT:** 20 watts  
**DIMENSIONS:** 169 (h) x 291 (w) x 166mm (d)  
**WEIGHT (KG/LB):** 3.9/8.6  
**CABINET:** MDF  
**LOUDSPEAKERS:** 2x 3" full-range drivers  
**VOICES:** 12 (6 electric, 2 acoustic sim, 2 acoustic, 2 bass)  
**CONTROLS:** Voice, gain, volume, ISF, mod, delay, reverb/dist, tap tempo buttons; effects type, effects level; manual/store button, Bluetooth button  
**FOOTSWITCH:** Optional Blackstar FS-11 ID:Core Footcontroller (£24.99)  
**ADDITIONAL FEATURES:** Bluetooth music streaming, USB recording, additional adjustments via Insider software, built-in tuner  
**OPTIONS:** Also available in red  
**Blackstar Amplification**  
**01604 817817**  
**www.blackstaramps.com**



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

**Guitarist says:** A well-thought out addition to the lifestyle amp market, delivering serious sound quality for both guitars and music – a living room essential!