

FENDER MUSTANG I & II £108 & £175
GUITAR AMPS



PHOTOGRAPHY BY JESSE WILD

Fender Mustang I & II

£108 & £175

Two new modelling amps with a familiar name. We rein 'em in and check 'em out... *by Simon Bradley*

Most famously, the Fender Mustang is a quirky short-scale electric guitar launched in 1965, that later found favour with indie bands due to its cool shape and livery. Joining it in 2010's corral are two new modelling amps that also use the Mustang moniker, but are as modern in specification as the Mustang guitar is now retro.

The lion's share of the Mustang II's spec is shared by the I and you can assume that what goes for the bigger amp is the same for the smaller unless stated. In fact all that separates them is the output, speaker size and cabinet dimensions, all of which are listed in the spec check: the operating system we'll describe is the same.

The tones are based around eight amp models, with three versions of each: orange, red and green. They're accessed via a rotary pot that scrolls all the way through; all the oranges, then greens, then reds. There are no menus to squint at, or multi-element LED displays to keep track of, so the Mustang is immediately easy to use.

Although loaded with tones from the outset, the concept is that you set up a sound in the non-editable orange banks, then save it to the specific amp model's red or green equivalent. Press the save button, scroll between red and green, then save again and it's done. The models comprise three of Fender's best-known amps, two British options and a trio of higher gain amps. All settings on the five-knob front panel, aside from the master volume, can be edited and saved.

Alongside the amps are a choice of effects and Fender has resisted the temptation to overload the Mustang with all manner of unusable noises in favour of different types of the same denomination of effect: chorus and deep chorus, a slow and fast Vibratone and so on.

There are also 12 reverb and delay effects – all of which are accessed, selected and edited via the mod or dly/rev pot.

Just how the effects are chosen comes across as a little clumsy in print so we'd suggest checking out the video demo on this issue's CD to see exactly how it's done. The basic premise though, is straightforward. The mod and dly/rev knobs are divided up into four sections labelled A, B, C, and D. What's more, within each of these reside three effects – one, two, and three. There are no notches to guide you nor, as we've said, a display to refer to, so the system can be a little fiddly at first, but the three small LEDs above the mod button illuminate to denote which effect you've dialled in. For example, the octaver can be found as modulation effect C3, so, to access it, you need to rotate the mod pot to segment C and then stop when the three bulb lights.

It's possible to alter the wet mix: press the exit button while, at the same time, turning either the mod or dly/rev pot up or down depending on which effect you're editing. What's more, the tap button not only regulates the delay time but can also be used to alter the speed of certain modulation effects.

For deep editing of effects and tones the Mustang comes out of the box with a DVD that, among other things, gives access to Fender's Fuse software, which allows you to really dig down into the amp via your computer. See this issue's CD for more on this subject, but even the most gnarly of luddites shouldn't be overly confused by this simple system.

Sounds

The Fender amp models are very impressive indeed. The '59 Bassman, the '65 Twin and '57 Deluxe options have much of

their inspirations' tonality with the classic glassy treble and expansive low end present in absolute spades. Dial-in a smidge of the impressive '65 spring reverb and it sounds (albeit doesn't particularly feel) like the 'real' thing.

There's no doubt that the II's 12-inch speaker gives a better overall tone than the eight-inch loaded into the I, but that's not to say that the smaller Mustang doesn't sound good in its own right. In fact, some of the Fender tones are twangier through the smaller speaker and can be warmed slightly by

The Bottom Line

Fender Mustang I

Marshall's 15-watt **MG15FX** (£130) provides a huge tone alongside a selection of digital effects, and for genuine valve warmth, the **Vox VT15** includes a single 12AX7. The **Line 6 Spider IV 15** (£91) offers four amp models and six Smart FX in a cool package.

Fender Mustang II

The **Peavey Vypyr 30** (£215) also offers 24 presets with five effects available simultaneously, while **Roland's Cube-40XL** features the excellent COSM amp modelling system. The 30-watt combo version of **Line 6's** impressive **Spider IV** costs £183.





The Mustang styling is very Fender, which will no doubt add to its appeal

tweaking the EQ or adding a hint of phaser or tremolo. The 40-watt II does offer more than enough poke to fulfil smaller gigs, however.

The British 60s model, which provides a thick and usable overdrive, is very enjoyable, but the higher gain models – most notably the American 90s and Metal 2000 options – aren't up to the standard of the rest of the amp. That said, we understand why Fender included them and, with a high-powered humbucker, they do provide an approximation of the correct feel for hard rock and metal.

There's a rather involved method of utilising an optional two-way footswitch to flick between just two patches in real time but, for the simple enjoyment of playing for playing's sake, scrolling through the amp models is more than satisfying.

Verdict

If you're umming and ahing about which boutique five-watt valve combo you should buy for home use, do you yourself a favour and try one of these. Neither boutique nor expensive, they nonetheless deliver top tones for home playing and practising. The Twin, Deluxe and Bassman models impress the most – good, usable sounds – while Metal 2000 feels like more of a box-ticking inclusion.

Thanks to the 12-inch speaker, the Mustang II is certainly the better sounding of the two but at a mere £108, the

Mustang I is still a very impressive option.

For practice, laying down some demos and even getting in touch with other users online and swapping sounds, the Mustangs are a steal. And thanks to the accuracy of many of its amp models, we're hard pushed to think of a better mix of vintage-inspired tones, price and modern technology.

When compared with other modelling amps available today, the Mustangs could be considered a tad backward, but when the tones are as good as this, we'd urge you to adapt. Tons of fun for not much money at all. **G**

The Bottom Line

Fender Mustang I

We like: Great price; a very portable unit

We dislike: The II sounds a little bit better

Guitarist says: For vintage-flavoured practice or home noodling this is remarkable

Fender Mustang II

We like: Satisfying tones; easy to use; impressive list of modern features

We dislike: The metal sounds don't stand up to the clean ones in quality

Guitarist says: A genuinely impressive modelling amp that recreates some of Fender's greatest moments



Fender Mustang I

PRICE: £108

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Solid-state modelling combo

OUTPUT: 20 watts

DIMENSIONS: 400 (w) x 193 (d) x 368.3mm (h)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 7.7/17

CABINET: Particleboard with textured vinyl

SPEAKERS: 1 x 8-inch Fender Special Design

CHANNELS: One

PRESETS: 24

CONTROLS: Gain, volume, treble, bass, master, eight-position preset pot, modulation pot, delay/reverb pot, save, exit and tap tempo buttons

FOOTSWITCH: Optional one-button Fender footswitch (£25.85)

ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Guitar input, footswitch input, aux input, headphones output, USB port. Package includes Ableton Live Lite 8 Fender Edition recording software, AmpliTube Fender LE software and instant access to Fender FUSE software, USB cable included

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: See Mustang II

Fender GBI

01342 331700

www.fender.co.uk

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Fender Mustang II

PRICE: £175

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Solid-state modelling combo

OUTPUT: 40 watts

DIMENSIONS: 464 (w) x 220 (d) x 438mm (h)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 10.9/24

CABINET: Particleboard with textured vinyl

SPEAKERS: 1 x 12-inch Fender Special Design

CHANNELS: One

PRESETS: 24

CONTROLS: Gain, volume, treble, bass, master, eight-position preset pot, modulation pot, delay/reverb control, save, exit and tap tempo buttons

FOOTSWITCH: Optional one-button Fender footswitch (£25.85)

ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Guitar input, footswitch input, aux input, headphones output, USB port. Package includes Ableton Live Lite 8 Fender Edition recording software, AmpliTube Fender LE software and instant access to Fender FUSE software, USB cable included

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: Aside from the reviewed Fender Mustang I, other modelling Fender amps include the G-Dec (from £149) and the Cyber-Twin SE (£1,729)



Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★