



Marshall x Jimi Hendrix 60th Anniversary JMH Half Stack

Paying tribute to 60 years of one of the most iconic pairings in guitar history, Marshall releases a signature Hendrix amp bundle, featuring not only an amp and cab, but a Fuzz Face and some very collectable extras.

BY PETE EMERY

▶ WHEN IT COMES to guitar players, there are simply none more iconic than Jimi Hendrix. His otherworldly tones and raw energy on stage were backed up by the roar of an almost equally iconic Marshall amplifier. The combination of the two yielded sounds that still influence guitar players 60 years later. So, to mark the 60th anniversary of this pairing, Marshall has launched a rather fetching Hendrix signature amp - the Marshall X Jimi Hendrix 60th Anniversary JMH Half Stack.

Based on a Marshall Plexi, specifically the 1959 Super Lead, which Hendrix famously used, the amp is a hand-wired limited edition with only 300 being made available.

Befitting of its collector's status is the striking purple and black "cosmic swirl" finish and the accoutrements that come along with it - a poster, a letter from Janie Hendrix, a handkerchief, some picks, and, most notably, a Fuzz Face pedal.

Hendrix's Fuzz Faces are things of lore, thanks to the way engineering guru Roger Mayer would curate and mod them, leading to fuzz sounds that would often vary.

The pedal included in this bundle is inspired by the aggressive sound used by Jimi in his final UK performance on the Isle of Wight in 1970, and is adorned with the same purple and black swirls as the amplifier. It's also not available to buy separately.

It would be remiss of Marshall to put out such a unique-looking head without a matching cabinet. Given that this is from the days when guitar amps needed to fill a venue, that cab is, of course, a 4x12 and loaded with Celestion G12H 30 speakers.

In short, we have a Fuzz Face, a Plexi, a 4x12, and a hell of a lot of volume. This should be fun.

Build quality

At \$4,999 or £3,799, I am expecting this head and cab combo to be nothing less than premium. Thankfully, that is exactly what we get.

Both sport thick birch plywood sides, hard-wearing tolex, and robust carrying handles that are clearly built to last. The controls on the head are all satisfying to turn, and the rotary selectors that control the impedance and mains power settings operate with a reassuring clunk, as do the power and Standby switches on the front.

The limited edition Fuzz Face is built to the overblown size of the vintage models, complete with the hardy metal chassis. These are both collector's items that will happily last the foreseeable future if they are looked after and properly maintained.

Maintenance for the head will include swapping out those tubes at some point, of which we have three ECC83s/12AX7's in the preamp (one of which is a phase splitter) and four EL34s kicking out those 100 watts.

This is all within hand-wired circuitry. Some will debate how much difference this makes tonally, but either way, it is certainly an indication that care has been taken here, and it's this sort of attention I would expect an amp in this price range to be getting.

For me, the star of the whole thing is that swirling purple finish against the more traditional black of a Marshall amp. While it's not a reference to a specific album cover or such like, in my opinion, it nails the psychedelia associated with Hendrix and rounds off what is a great-looking bundle.

Usability and features

One of the joys of a good ol' tube amp is that you just plug in, turn up until it sounds good, and go. Given that this amp is essentially a Marshall 1959 Super Lead, it would be rude not to start the same way here.

As one of the most iconic amps of all time, many of us will already be familiar with this setup. But for the uninitiated, we have two channels - a High Treble and a Normal channel, each with a high and low sensitivity input.

The high sensitivity is designed for low-output pickups, and the low sensitivity is designed for high-output pickups.

These channels can be jumped with a patch lead (by, for example, connecting the low-sensitivity input of the High Treble channel to the high-sensitivity input of the Normal channel) and mixed to taste.

On the front panel, you find everything you need to tweak the tone - a three-band EQ, a Presence control, and a Volume for each

"An unforgiving beast, but the sort of amp I would urge every player to experience at least once"

channel, in addition to a power and a standby switch.

Then, around the back are two ¼" speaker outputs, an output selector allowing for 4, 8, and 16 ohms outputs, and a mains selector that switches between 100, 120, and 230 volts.

So, nothing fancy. A faithful re-issue of traditional amplifier technology that is bound to please the purists, resulting in an easy-to-use piece of gear, free from the complications that modernity can bring.

The only thing you need to be careful with is that you select the correct impedance for the cab you are using. Marshall helpfully includes a few notes on this in its manual.

It's worth noting that with no master control or modern tech, breakup is achieved via pushing the valves with the volume controls. Wattage is not a measure of volume, but even in the context of 100W amps, believe me when I say this amp is loud!

So, in pushing it into breakup, you are going to want to make sure you are in a big room that can handle the level, or employ some modern tech to tame it. In our case, a Torpedo Captor X Plus.

Aiding in that volume is that 4x12 cab, which helpfully comes with castors. Not that I found those helpful while lugging it up the stairs to our studio's testing room.

The Fuzz Face follows the vintage correct approach with an unwieldy size, no power input, and a 9V battery compartment that requires removing the backplate to access.

As much as these vintage correct appointments are kind of a pain compared to pedals with mains inputs and easy-to-reach battery compartments, the result is a bundle that feels like it pays real homage to the time and player, which is entirely the point here.

Sounds

Playing these amps is a visceral experience. It is not the smooth, produced sound that many will have heard in digital versions of a Plexi-style amp. It is brash, unforgivingly touch-sensitive, and undeniably addictive.

The High Treble channel is very bright, unpleasantly so until you get the volume around the halfway point. Here, the low-end increases and starts to complement that very present treble, creating a more balanced sound, but one that is still very forward in the treble and high-mid range.

The Normal channel is the opposite and remains quite dark until similarly pushed, with much less of that high end. For me, the best results are gained by using both and jumping the inputs.

That three-band EQ is relatively subtle in the Presence, Bass, and Mid, giving enough to tweak the amp to the room whilst preserving its character. The Treble has a much wider sweep, going from dull and dark to ear-piercingly bright.

I am testing with a Les Paul Classic, a Custom Shop Telecaster, and, of course, a Stratocaster. Setting both channels to around seven creates a snappy drive with that mid-forward, present high end that is typical of that Marshall-style, as you would expect.

It is wonderfully dynamic, responding to the different pickups in the guitars and reacting faithfully to the guitar's volume pots, perhaps more than any other amp I have played.

This sort of touch sensitivity and detailed high-end make the amp feel like it is truly connected to your fingers and your guitar. However, a word of warning, it also makes the amp an unforgiving beast, recreating every bit of a player's nuance and therefore every imperfection. Not for the faint of heart.

It's a sound that makes most sense in a band context, where that presence will serve to cut nicely, and the low end is filled by other instruments. I suspect that many would find these tones to be too bright on their own.

Indeed, it took me a moment to properly adjust and start appreciating it during testing.

I am, of course, playing through as isn't long Hendrix riffs as I can remember, and it may before I am plugging in that Fuzz Face with the Strat.

GUITAR WORLD VERDICT



The Marshall X Jimi Hendrix 60th Anniversary JMH Half Stack provides purist-satisfying 1959 Super Lead tones and feel, in a bundle that pays a poignant tribute to the Hendrix/Marshall pairing. For collectors and enthusiasts, this will be a much-coveted purchase.

PROS

- + A handwired version of one of the most iconic amplifiers in guitar history.
- + Stunning cosmic swirl finish.
- + Classic Marshall Plexi tones
- + Vintage simplicity.

CONS

- No modern features.
- Too loud for anything but a stage.
- The Fuzz Face lacks a power input (as is vintage correct).

SPECS

TYPE: Tube amp head and cab with Fuzz Face
ORIGIN: UK
OUTPUT: 100W
SPEAKER: 4x12 Celestion G12H 30
CHANNELS: 2
CONTROLS: Presence, Bass, Mid, Treble, Volume 1, Volume 2
CONNECTIVITY: ¼" instrument input
FOOTSWITCH: No
WEIGHT: 20.5kg/45.1lbs (head)
DIMENSIONS: 29.1"x12"x8.2"/740 x 305 x 210 mm (head)

A traditional Fuzz Face will change as you turn the volume up, opening more high-end as you get louder. For me, the best way to use them is to gun the volume, set the Fuzz control just a little back from full, and control the amount of Fuzz with your guitar's volume control.

This Hendrix Isle Of Wight festival set-inspired Fuzz Face possesses the aggressive high end as promised, and certainly cuts. There is a little more gain than on some other versions of the Fuzz Face I have played, so I find myself running the Fuzz control back a little further than usual in order to have it clean up properly on the guitar's volume control.

With the guitar's volume gunned, it is a full and fat fuzz, obviously reminiscent of that Foxy Lady and Voodoo Chile sound. And with the volume rolled back, the circuitry of a Fuzz Face allows the signal to clean up spectacularly well whilst staying bright, forming an essential part of Hendrix's cleaner tones. All in all, I am having a lot of fun here.

But let's not forget, the Marshall Plexi sound was also used by the likes of Paul Kossoff, Jimmy Page, and many others. If you want those sounds, get some humbuckers and dial in some more gain from the volume controls, and you're there.

Additionally, in more modern contexts, this sort of amp works well as a pedal platform. Using a Thorpy Kudu overdrive pedal, I am able to push the amp into high-gain territory, useful for some more modern sounds.

Having no effects loop does somewhat limit the amp in this context, so you will need to be comfortable running your time-based effects into the front end, especially considering that there is no onboard reverb.

Verdict

The Marshall 1959 Super Lead is an undeniably influential sound and is the sort of amplifier that I think every player should experience at least once.

Not only to provide some context to what people really mean when they talk about that Marshall thing, but to gain a better understanding of the type of amp that contributed to the history and development of the guitar.

While the amp is impractically loud, and the fuzz is way too big for most boards, as a tribute to the time and player, I wouldn't have it any other way.