

CHANNELS

YOU can swap between the Artist's two channels using the front panel switch or the supplied single-button footswitch. Channel changing is practically noiseless

SPEAKER

THE Artist 15's 12" Celestion G12 V-Type sits in an oversized enclosure, which helps to project low frequencies more efficiently

ISF

Blackstar's patented ISF control shifts the EQ from British to USA response and covers all points in between

AT A GLANCE

TYPE: Valve/solid-state preamp,

digital reverb, valve power amp

OUTPUT: 15W

SPEAKER: 1x Celestion G12 V-type

VALVES: 2x ECC83, 2x 6L6GC

CONTROLS: Channel 1: volume, tone; channel 2: gain, volume, bass, mid and treble, ISF; master volume, reverb level

SOCKETS: Input, effects loop send/return, speaker-emulated line out, 3x speaker out

WEIGHT: 18kg

DIMENSIONS: (HxWxD)

486 x 612 x 258mm

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BLACKSTAR ARTIST 15 £649

Blackstar revisits its roots and comes clean with a new series

IT'S eight years since this writer was privileged to preview the first Blackstar amp, the Artisan. Hand-wired and beautifully made, the Artisan was among the best-sounding boutique designs we'd tried. Since then, Blackstar's early promise has bloomed into a global brand with a huge catalogue and a string of high-profile users. However, the Artisan wasn't cheap, and it felt like Blackstar's range was missing an affordable, vintage-voiced combo designed for modern players who prefer to use pedals for overdriven tones. Enter the Artist Series. Designed to capture the spirit of the Artisan at a more reasonable price point, today we're looking at the smallest amp in the family, the Artist 15 1x12.

The Artist 15 has a solid, understated look, with a ply cabinet and a custom vintage woven-paper grille cloth, while the electronics live inside a robust, open-ended steel tray chassis; one

large printed circuit board holds nearly everything, including the front panel controls and valve bases, with a smaller one for the rear panel connections. Build quality is up there with Blackstar's typically high standards; you know this amp can be relied on to do the business night after night without quitting on you. Valve power

The Artist's clean channels are perfect for pedal drives

comes via a pair of cathode-biased 6L6s, with a pair of 12AX7s in the preamp and a digital reverb. You get two footswitchable channels for the preamp: channel one has a simple volume and tone control, while channel two has the familiar gain, volume, three-band EQ and Blackstar's clever ISF knob, which takes the EQ from British to US response and all points in between.

There's a series effects loop and a speaker-emulated output on the back panel, too – all familiar stuff.

The big difference is the overdrive on channel two, or rather the lack of it: the Artist is intended to behave like a vintage non-master volume design, and as a result, both channels are clean – channel one is super-clean while

channel two has a moderate USA-flavoured overdrive that sounds fabulous for blues, country and jazz; it's a big syrupy tone with a sweet treble, tight bass and balanced midrange that works with any guitar, but really takes off with bright PAF-style humbuckers. Both channels react brilliantly to pedals, too: we tried a selection of old, new and boutique overdrives

and they all worked extremely well, adding different core characteristics without masking the amp's essential core tone.

It may not offer the versatility of the likes of the HT series, but the Artist's dual clean channels are perfect for many of today's pedal drives and sound great on their own, too, implementing vintage-inspired tones along with modern features such as the emulated line out and superb digital reverb. Blackstar doesn't have this niche all to itself, of course – it faces plenty of competition in this sector, but with most of those amps costing twice as much, the Artist 15 looks set to be a new classic.

Nick Guppy

SUMMARY	FEATURES			
	SOUND QUALITY			
	VALUE FOR MONEY			
	BUILD QUALITY			
	USABILITY			
	OVERALL RATING	★★★★★		