



Marshall DSL15C combo, DSL40C combo & DSL100 head **£533, £633 & £777**

Marshall's evergreen DSL range of amps gets a revamp. We take a look at the new class of 2012 *by Nick Guppy*

The great man may have gone, but his legacy in rock 'n' roll continues loud and proud. Over the past year or two, we've seen not one, but three massive signature amps – for Slash, Yngwie Malmsteen and Joe Satriani – and now Marshall has turned its attention to an amp range that for many years has been the cornerstone of the company's catalogue: the JCM2000 Dual Super Lead, or DSL. Dating back to the late 1990s, the DSLs have been in production ever since, and many people see them as the spiritual successors to the JCM800 and 900 ranges that did so much to define modern rock-guitar tone. Even though the advanced JVM range has superseded them, for many, the DSL is still the archetypal modern Marshall – but an update was overdue. Well, here it is, and we're reviewing three products from the new range: the DSL15C combo (there's a head, too), the DSL40C combo and the DSL100 head.

Cracking open the boxes, it's no surprise that all three amps draw heavily from the iconic Marshall style; oversized cabinets, black vinyl, black grille, gold panel, white piping and, of course, the familiar white script logo are all present. The generous cabinet dimensions contribute to a somewhat larger-than-life presence, but the proportions are solid and balanced. Viewed close up, there are some subtle styling changes compared to the old DSLs. The vinyl seems thinner and shinier than normal, the anodised gold panel has a smoother, more reflective sheen, and screws have replaced the gold studs that secure the corner

protectors. There's also a smart, comfortable new carry handle with flush-end caps.

On the small info card stapled to the rear panels of the combos and the underside of the head, the words 'Made in Vietnam' are easy to miss. It's a shame, but perhaps inevitable that offshore manufacturing has reached further up the Marshall catalogue than before in order to keep prices competitive. MDF also replaces plywood for the new cabinets; it's harder and heavier, with different resonance qualities, although on smaller cabinets the differences are less obvious. While the DSL15C is a comfortable one-handed lift, the DSL40C is not, and would definitely benefit from a pair of side grips.

The original EL84-powered DSL201 and 401 designs have been replaced with a 15-watt 6V6-powered head and combo – not a bad thing, as 6V6s are much more reliable. All three amps have substantial pressed and folded steel chassis, with

integral ribs to reduce flex. The DSL15 has an open-ended tray, while the 40C and 100H feature traditional steel boxes.

As you'd expect, the electronics are almost all PCB-mounted, with one large board supporting preamp, power amp and power supply components, while smaller boards support the input jack, rear-panel jacks and the digital reverb, which replaces the original spring units. The board quality is typical Marshall, with through-plating, liberal use of metal film resistors to reduce hiss, and solid metal standoffs to keep everything in place. It's interesting that while the 15-watt models mount all the valve bases on PCBs, on both EL34-powered amps the preamp valves are board-mounted, but the output valves are hand-wired. We've grown

The Rivals

Hughes & Kettner's **TubeMeister 36** head may only have 36 watts, but it's got power to spare for most gigs, and boasts three channels with MIDI connectivity and a built-in attenuator. For just £799, it's a steal. **Blackstar's HT Club 40** combo has cool looks and serious big-league tone for £589. **Vox's NT15 Night Train** head also offers great tone for just £459 – shop around and you can get the matching cab for just a few quid more

used to seeing amps at all price brackets mount valve bases on PCBs today. In the early days, this was where a lot of reliability issues cropped up, as cheaper boards couldn't take repeated hot/cold cycling, and tracks would often break down. But most modern PCB materials are more resistant to this. However, for areas that take serious heat, such as output-valve pin contacts, hand-wiring is still more reliable in the end. Having said that, the wiring and soldering on these two samples isn't quite up to the high standards we'd normally associate with Marshall. Hopefully, this area

The spiritual successors to the JCM800 and 900, the DSL amps are the archetypal modern Marshalls



Four EL34s in the 100-watt head. It's the Marshall staple for crunching rock tones



All in all, the larger DSLs provide enough versatility for most players, while the DSL15's reduced feature set is still pretty impressive

will be watched carefully as production ramps up. Overall, though, all three amps are certainly worthy of the Marshall logo and should handle non-stop gigging without any issues.

As the name suggests, the DSLs are two-channel designs, with two pairs of gain and volume controls called Classic Gain and Ultra Gain, feeding a shared bass, mid and treble EQ. The EQ's range is widened by a button called Tone Shift, which reduces the midrange for a flatter response and smoother attack. Further enhancements on the head and 40-watt combo include two modes on each channel, switching between clean or crunch, and Lead 1 or a more gained-out Lead 2. There's also a resonance control next to the presence control to tailor the power amp's low-frequency response, as well as separate reverb knob that works for both channels.

The DSL15's shorter control panel lacks the mode switches, offering just the clean and Lead 2 overdrive voicings, while the resonance control is replaced with a preset Deep switch and one reverb level control for both channels. Another less immediately obvious omission

is the standby switch. The DSL15's cathode-biased output stage doesn't need a standby switch to help prolong valve life – the voltages sort themselves out as the amp warms up – but not being able to hit a switch to mute things during a gig or recording session is a slight annoyance, while the panel looks unbalanced without it.

On the rear panel, all three amps feature a trio of fixed-impedance output jacks, with pentode/triode switching to reduce output power roughly by half. The triode option also reduces high-frequency response for a warmer feel. There's a colour-coded footswitch jack, and the head and 40-watt combo also feature a fixed-level series effects loop with an on/off switch. All in all, the larger DSLs provide enough versatility for most players, while the 15's reduced feature set is still pretty impressive.

Sounds

We tried the DSLs with a variety of guitars, including an old Strat with regular output Duncan Alnico Pros and a PAF-loaded Gibson Les Paul Standard. All three amps powered up smoothly, with almost no hum, and just a little

hiss. The DSL40C's clean channel is brash and punchy, more in keeping with Marshall clean channels of yesteryear, with a powerful treble and a peaky, aggressive midrange that's mostly tamed by the tone-shift button. At the other end of the gain spectrum, the super-saturated Lead 2 sound provides practically endless sustain and a heavy overdrive that's more effective for single notes than powerchords. The two voicings in between – the Crunch and Lead 1 options – are

far more versatile and pleasing to use, the crunch voice is great for blues and classic rock with a Strat or Les Paul, while the Lead 1 voice sings and responds very musically, with all the right Marshall ingredients.

As you'd expect, with its practically identical electronics the DSL100 head does the same thing, just louder. We used a standard Vintage 30-loaded 2x12 cab to test the head, and this really pepped up the tone compared to the drivers loaded in the combos.



The DSL40C has a resonance control to tailor its power amp's bass response

The DSL15C offers pretty much instant gratification, with a massive overdrive sound that's easily tweaked to cover both Euro and US metal sounds. The clean channel isn't as good as the larger combo, but that probably won't put off the majority of potential users.

On all three amps, the new digital reverb stays smooth and warm, tailing off nicely as the levels are raised. One part of Marshall's heritage is assured – they're seriously loud beasts. Even the DSL15 will rattle windows when turned up to what Billy Gibbons calls 'Patent Pending' levels.

Verdict

We think these new DSLs should receive a welcome from many Marshall fans, with the right looks and sounds from the larger models to satisfy any serious rocker. Meanwhile, the DSL15C combo is a decent 'first proper amp' that many younger players will enjoy. Some features have been lost on the combos compared to the old EL84 models, but the new range is more or less identical in features compared to the old DSL50 and 100 heads. The digital reverb is a step in the right direction, and suggests that a DSL FX model may be joining the line-up.

Traditionalists may be a little unhappy with the offshore origin and MDF cabs, but the pricing will offset those grumbles. Affordable they may be, but there's plenty of stiff competition for the DSL from home and abroad, with lots of amps offering similar features for the money. One feature they can't offer us, however, is that famous white script logo. If you're stepping up to your first Marshall, then these new DSLs won't disappoint. **G**

The Bottom Line

We like: Plenty of hot, high-octane rock sounds from all three amps

We dislike: The DSL15 is a little muddy wound up – pity the emulated line-out has gone, as has the DSL15's effects loop

Guitarist says: Here's to another 15 years of the DSL!



Marshall DSL15C

PRICE: £533
ORIGIN: Vietnam
TYPE: All-valve, 2-channel combo with solid-state rectification
OUTPUT: 15 watts RMS
VALVES: 4x ECC83/12AX7 preamp, 2x 6V6 power amp
DIMENSIONS: 475 (h) x 505 (w) 255mm (d)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 17/38
CABINET: 15mm MDF
LOUDSPEAKER: 1 Celestion G12E-60
CHANNELS: 2
CONTROLS: 2x gain and volume, treble, mid, bass, presence and reverb
FOOTSWITCH: Supplied single-button footswitch changes channels
ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Tone shift and deep switches, pentode/triode switching
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: The DSL15H costs £444
Marshall
01908 375411
www.marshallamps.com

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Marshall DSL40C

PRICE: £633
ORIGIN: Vietnam
TYPE: All-valve, 2-channel combo with solid-state rectification
OUTPUT: 40 watts RMS
VALVES: 4x ECC83/12AX7 preamp, 2x EL34 power amp
DIMENSIONS: 490 (h) x 621 (w) 255mm (d)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 23/51
CABINET: 15mm MDF
LOUDSPEAKER: 1 Celestion G12 Seventy 80
CHANNELS: 2
CONTROLS: 2x gain and volume, treble, mid, bass, presence, resonance, 2x reverb
FOOTSWITCH: Supplied 2-button footswitch changes channels, toggles reverb
ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Clean/crunch, Lead 1/Lead 2 and tone shift switches, pentode/triode switching, series effects loop with on/off switch
OPTIONS: None

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Marshall DSL100H

PRICE: £777
ORIGIN: Vietnam
TYPE: All-valve, 2-channel combo with solid-state rectification
OUTPUT: 100 watts RMS
VALVES: 4x ECC83/12AX7 preamp, 4x EL34 power amp
DIMENSIONS: 274 (h) x 741 (w) 242mm (d)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 24/52
CABINET: 15mm MDF
CHANNELS: 2
CONTROLS: 2x gain and volume, treble, mid, bass, presence, resonance, 2x reverb
FOOTSWITCH: Supplied two-button footswitch changes channels, toggles reverb
ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Clean/crunch, Lead 1/Lead 2 and tone shift switches, pentode/triode switching, series effects loop with on/off switch
OPTIONS: None

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



The DSL40C uses a Celestion Seventy 80 speaker



The DSL40C and 100H offer two modes in each channel