



PHOTOGRAPH BY JOBY SESSIONS

Orange Dark Terror £399

The British company continues its winning formula with a Terror aimed directly at hard rockers *by Mick Taylor*

Metal in the morning – that’ll be our lasting memory of the Orange Dark Terror, and a fond one at that. There we were, slightly bleary-eyed in front of Doug Doppler, Orange’s impossibly enthusiastic demonstrator at the 2011 Frankfurt Musikmesse. “You get the idea!” he yells as he blasts through any number of massive riffs and incendiary solos. Indeed we do. It’s an Orange Tiny Terror for rock and metal players, right? “Right!”

You have to hand it to the British company. On launching the Tiny Terror back in 2006, it kick-started the whole genre of modern, credible lunchbox-sized heads and in so doing furthered the cause of little amps in general. They are now officially not, as many guitarists previously assumed, entirely silly. Quite the opposite, in fact.

So, the Dark Terror. It follows the same dimensions as the immensely popular Tiny Terror, its metal chassis turned the appropriate Colour Of Rock, with a flash of tangerine behind Orange’s customary graphic symbols to keep it on-brand. The included gigbag is both cute and practical, though the shoulder strap – as with Terrors before it – could really do with more padding and tear protection. A small point, but one that becomes relevant when you have your guitar on one shoulder, Tiny Terror on the other and both hands full of mic stands and pedalboards.

A quick peak through the slotted grille reveals two more preamp valves than you’d find in a Tiny Terror. As it turns out one is for the extra preamp gain stages and the other is to drive the series effects loop, a welcome addition over the

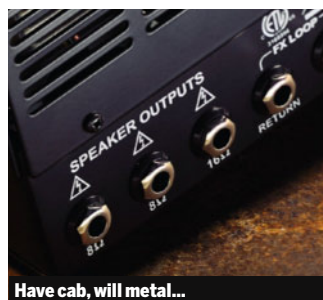
standard Terror. All of the electronic components bar the transformers, IEC mains inlet and power switches are mounted on a custom-designed PCB, screwed securely to the

metal chassis. Most people agree that the more expensive Hard Wired Tiny Terror sounds better than PCB version, but it comes in at almost twice the price. While we’re on the subject, there are also plenty of people who’d agree that the point-to-point, hard-wired circuit approach matters far more when it comes to low-gain, vintage-type tones. Moving on...

The Dark Terror’s power section uses a pair of EL84 valves operating in class A.



The Shape control adds some extra sonic versatility to the mix



Have cab, will metal...

They're not exactly widely used in the metal world, but they nevertheless have a good track record in harmonically rich-sounding rock: Queen's Brian May being the obvious example with his flat-out Vox AC30s.

There's really nothing that could possibly confuse you on the front panel: gain controls the level of preamp distortion, volume is the master level and shape is an effective tone control that replaces the tone pot on the regular TT, more of which presently.

Sounds

Don't be put off if you don't play metal, because there's much more to the Dark Terror than that. For example, with the shape control further to the left, the EQ response is much more classic rock in character, where the amp yields plenty of sweet, singing, Gary Moore Still Got The Blues-era sounds with the right guitar and playing style. In that sense, if you hanker after a smooth, heavily overdriven tone and can't be fussed with using pedals, you'll be happier here than with the Tiny Terror.

Considering how much gain there is on tap from the three 12AX7s, the Dark Terror is still highly responsive to your pick attack and variances in your guitar's volume controls – it will clean up well as you roll back, just don't expect huge clean tones: they're not here. The signature Orange sizzle is, however, which really helps you cut through a live mix and that's essential when you 'only' have 15 watts on tap. We say 'only' because it's plenty loud enough to gig in a normal band situation if you're using Celestion Vintage 30s or a similarly efficient speaker. Obviously if you're used to 50- and 100-watt amps, the Dark Terror can't compete with the power and control of the low



Considering how much gain there is on tap, the Dark Terror is still highly responsive to your pick attack and variances in guitar volume controls

end in particular, but it's worth saying that there are fewer and fewer of us who really get to crank those amps up any more.

The further right you set the shape control, the more 'metal' it sounds, that's to say prioritising bass and treble frequencies over mid-range kick. So with shape and gain all the way right, and fed with the John Petrucci JPXI we reviewed last issue, this is a superb metal tone. Our tastes always nudge the shape knob back towards the left, but the point is that the variation is there for all: there's so much more in those three controls than you'd think. If we could add anything it'd be a master presence pot to enable you to dial in the high end as you like it. As it is, your guitar's tone pot does a reasonable job of that.

The difference between the 15- and seven-watt settings is immediately noticeable; more compression and squasier playing dynamics in the latter and of course reduced volume level. In truth, we always prefer the 15-watt setting, you may well disagree.

Verdict

Orange's Tiny Terror concept is a winning formula, so it makes perfect sense to offer a high-gain version in the Dark Terror. Whether metallers' egos will allow them to use a teeny tiny

amp is a moot point perhaps, and it certainly won't compete with a 50- or 100-watt Marshall, Mesa or indeed Orange amp for volume, especially at the more mid-scooped, 'metal' end of its tonal spectrum. Use an efficient speaker and mic it up, however, and you'll be rewarded with a world-class hard rock and metal sound that will fill any stage. In the studio, it's nothing less than a godsend.

We can see the Dark Terror being rather popular among heavy blues-rockers, too, and also as a superb choice for heavy rock rhythm players who don't want to break the bank or their backs with a big, 'posh' amp. And you know what's really cool? One Tiny Terror and one Dark Terror sat on top of a stereo 4 x 12 cab. Might that sound better than the single sub-£1,000 rock amp you're currently playing? Indeed it might... **G**

The Bottom Line

We like: Portability; sounds; price; simplicity

We dislike: Just one global tone control

Guitarist says: The simplest, smallest, most usable hard rock valve amp on the market

Orange Dark Terror

PRICE: £399

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: All-valve single-channel head

OUTPUT: 15 or 7 watts, switchable

VALVES: 3 x 12AX7, 1 x 12AT7, 2 x EL84

CONTROLS: Volume, shape, gain

SPEAKER: N/A

FOOTSWITCH: N/A

ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Series effects loop, switchable output power for 15 or seven watts

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 7.5/15

DIMENSIONS: 300(w) x 170(h) x 140mm (d)

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: Tiny Terror head (£360.36), Tiny Terror combo (£515.36), Tiny Terror Hard Wired edition (£677.22), Dual Terror (£515.36)

OMEC

0208 905 2828

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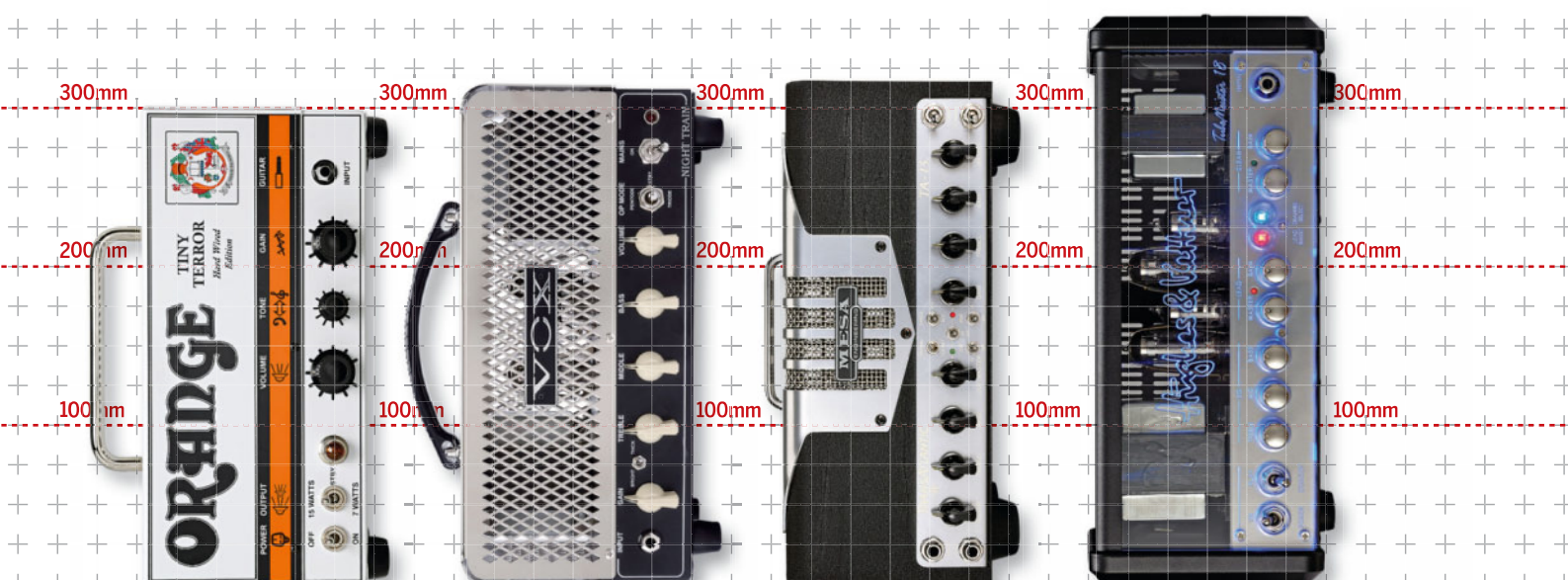
Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★ >

Little Headed

Since the first Tiny Terror, there have been numerous entrants to the compact valve head market in both wood and metal. We examine the rivals... **by Mick Taylor**



Orange Tiny Terror £360.36

The amp that started all of this back in 2006. Single-channel, capable of a range of clean-ish to medium-gained classic rock and blues tones. Switchable seven or 15 watts output power with a pair of EL84s. There's also the Hard Wired edition (£677) that does sound better.

Vox NT15H Night Train £443.99

A single-channel 15-watter that runs on a pair of EL84s and, like the Tiny Terror, switches down to half power. The three-band EQ section makes it a little more adjustable than the Orange, plus there's the bright/thick switch – the latter setting bypasses the tone controls for a heavier gained sound.

Mesa TA-15 £1,129

Spend this much and you expect something special. The TransAtlantic delivers that with huge tonal versatility and the loudest voice of all the amps here. Two channels, one of which is Voxy, the other more Californian in nature, it's everything you expect of Mesa: referencing the past, but looking confidently to the future.

Hughes & Kettner Tubemeister 18 £559

The German entrant uses two channels that span high headroom cleans to metal gains. It has an effects loop and the best speaker simulated direct out of any valve amp. Output levels are switchable at 18, five, and one watt, plus it'll run silent with no speaker for direct recording. A true all-rounder.

Choices, choices

Which one would you go for?

We asked three of Guitarist's staff and alumni which would be their preferred mini-head choice for all-round use.

Mick spends most of his playing life in pubs and clubs fighting for sonic space and projection in a noisy rock and blues band environment, which explains his usual preference for powerful amps with tons of headroom.

Neville's gigs take him to many of the UK's small and medium-sized theatres. As such he benefits from big PAs, great monitoring and plenty of physical and sonic space.

Nick plays a variety of gigs in small venues, including jazz, country, blues and classic rock, as well as recording, where he's often called on to recreate a range of signature tones.

Mick Taylor Editor, Guitarist



"The Tubemeister impressed me the minute I saw it. Hand on heart, I'd choose the Mesa for pure tone, but two things swing it for the H&K. First is price; second is the Red Box DI, which sounds great mixed with a mic'd speaker. It's just loud enough for small gigs, though obviously it can't match the headroom of a 50- or 100-watter. It's superb for recording."



Last reviewed: 344

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Hayden Mini MoFo £359

Hayden's unique styling wraps around a dual-EL84-powered 15-watter, offering a wide range of sounds from a single channel with the additional, footswitchable MoFo mode. Dual inputs offer more British- and American-leaning tones respectively, there's an effects loop and also a 'stealth' switch to drop the power when practising.

Egnater Tweaker £369

This Guitarist Gold Award-winning 15-watter uses a pair of 6V6 output valves and a number of switches to help it go from sparkling cleans through to all-out high gain. Far Eastern build keeps the cost low, but it still managed to impress our amp guru Nick Guppy from a technical point of view. Startlingly good.

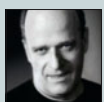
Laney Cub Head £254

Laney's single-channel 15-watter is the little brother of the Lionheart series of amps and runs on a pair of EL84 output valves for classic British sounding crunch and drive tones. It includes reverb and 'less-than-one-watt' input, which drops everything down to bedroom levels.

Blackstar HT-5RH £289

This runaway success from the British company offers two channels, a level-adjustable effects loop, digital reverb, speaker-simulated direct out and the ISF tone control. It gets power from a single 12BH7 valve, which definitely gives it its own tone. It's a good all-round choice, though you'll want more watts for un-mic'd pub gigs.

Nick Guppy Guitarist Amp Expert



"The Egnater gets my vote for its flexibility, good looks and bargain price. For blues and classic rock the HT-5 is great fun, but the Tweaker's USA tones are more versatile for what I do. I've used it to create a Billy Gibbons-style backing track and for jazz cabaret comping behind a solo singer; two wildly different sounds, yet it was perfect for both jobs."



Last reviewed: 334

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Neville Marten Editor, Guitar Techniques



"I've loved Laney's full-on UK Lionheart series since I saw it in pre-production, and much of that development has ended up in the Cub. It's the least handsome of all the amps here, but I'm drawn to its leonine roar, simplicity of operation and smooth onboard reverb – an absolute necessity for home practice on the 'less than one watt' setting. Great price too."



Last reviewed: 321 (Cub 8 & 10)

Test results (Cub 8 & 10)

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★