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**Guitarist
CHOICE**

Orange Crush 35RT £199

The UK amp legend aims to make practice perfect

CONTACT: Orange Amplification **PHONE:** 0208 905 2828 **WEB:** www.orangeamps.com

Introduced at this year's Winter NAMM show, Orange's smart new Crush range of practice amps shares the same distinctive looks as the company's bigger all-valve products. The top of the range Crush 35RT includes a digital reverb and a built-in chromatic tuner, while the core tone comes from a two-channel analogue preamp with four gain stages, pumping 35 watts into a heavyweight custom-made 10-inch loudspeaker. There's also an aux in and a speaker-emulated headphones output featuring Orange's all-new Cabsim circuit. Around the back, you'll also find a fully

buffered effects loop, and a footswitch socket to flip between the 35RT's clean and dirty channels. With all these features wrapped up in Orange's classic late-60s styling, the Crush 35RT looks lean, mean and purposeful, and more than capable of dealing with live gigs as well as home use.

Sounds

The Crush 35RT's fat clean sounds can be tweaked by the classic passive EQ to flatter single coils or humbuckers, while a touch of reverb sweetens each note's decay. There's plenty of spare loudspeaker headroom to

handle the Crush's bouncy response too, giving the impression that you're hearing a much bigger enclosure.

Switching to the dirty channel unleashes the Crush 35RT's four-stage preamp, which has been cleverly engineered to give a very wide range of distortion sounds. Below halfway you're in the classic 60s and 70s era, with some great nearly clean and crunch tones that will more than satisfy players looking to emulate early Led Zep, Free and Fleetwood Mac. Push the gain control past 12 o'clock, add a little more bass and a little less midrange, and the 35RT goes from classic Oasis into the Dark

Terror metal zone that's made Orange the amp of choice for many bands in that genre.

The cool thing about the Crush 35RT's tones is that they don't sound processed; there's an organic quality that closely emulates the feel and response of playing an all-valve Orange amp, with a very good digital reverb effect that's superior to most other competitors.

The new Cabsim speaker emulation is similarly realistic, giving a decent approximation of the woody thump of a PPC 4x12 through the headphone socket, which does double duty as a reasonably quiet unbalanced DI/recording output. The 35RT's onboard chromatic tuner is quick, accurate and hangs on to the note for long enough for hassle-free tuning. It can either be left on or turned off, if the flashing lights become a distraction.

Verdict

It's amazing how far the humble practice amp has evolved over the past decade – at the cutting edge, products that were once barely more than amplified fuzz boxes have evolved into sophisticated rehearsal and recording tools. By keeping Orange's Crush 35RT firmly in the analogue domain, Orange has gone a step further and given us a practice amp with enough power for small gigs and a tone that's not too far removed from the kind of sounds you'd expect from one of their all-valve products. All this at a price that's less than you'd pay for a top-drawer overdrive pedal. **[NG]**

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: *Serious tone at an amazingly low price*

VIDEO DEMO



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Guitarist CHOICE

Mesa Engineering CabClone £219

Get a load of this...

CONTACT: Westside Distribution PHONE: 0844 326 2000 WEB: www.mesaboogie.com

The humble load box has recently been re-invented by the clever folks at Mesa Engineering, and the result is a small, beautifully designed and indispensable product called the CabClone. It has three functions: a load box, a speaker emulator and a balanced DI output. The built-in resistive load works for amps up to 100 watts and auto-activates if a loudspeaker isn't plugged in. The DI output is fully adjustable from mic to pro line level, ensuring the CabClone will interface with practically everything you'd care to throw at it. Finally, the speaker emulator has three settings to approximate open, closed and vintage closed back cabinets. On the back there are jack in and out sockets, an XLR for the balanced DI, plus an unbalanced line out, and a headphones socket.

In Use

The CabClone works without drama and has plenty of reserve power handling capacity. The

real surprise, even by Mesa standards, is the quality of the CabClone's speaker emulation, which is practically a dead ringer for the real thing. We compared it to three different 4x12s and an open-backed 2x12; used direct into a PA system it was impossible to tell when the CabClone was in use – you can almost hear the ambience and air of a real enclosure being pushed.

Verdict

Beyond doubt, Mesa has taken the load box/speaker emulator to the next level and created a product that's practically essential for any regularly gigging guitar player. As you might expect from Mesa, it's not cheap, but the superior build and tone quality more than justify the price. **[NG]**

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: A totally professional tool that can sort out any number of recording and mic'ing issues

Guitarist CHOICE



Dunlop Cry Baby Mini Wah CBM95 £89

Tiny baby, fully grown tones

CONTACT: Westside Distribution PHONE: 0141 248 4812 WEB: www.jimdunlop.com

It had to happen eventually: hot off the back of its Mini Fuzz Faces, Dunlop has chopped the Cry Baby in half, but without sacrificing spec. As well as true-bypass switching, a smooth-riding Hot Potz potentiometer and red Fasel inductor, the Mini also packs an internal three-way switch, which shifts between low, vintage and GCB95 voicings. Finally, it's powered by either a nine-volt battery or power supply.

Sounds

On first sweep, there's a surprising amount of travel on the Mini, more akin to a full-size Cry Baby than similar mini waha. Your heel moves further back than on a regular wah, though, so best get that ankle in shape! On the middle 'vintage' setting, the pedal's sweep is full and wide – it's closer to Dunlop's higher-end 535Q or CAE waha than the standard-issue GCB95, thanks to a gradual transition from bass to treble that does away with harsh high-end in the toe-

down position. However, if you want to engage the GCB95's wiry upper range, flicking to the right on the three-position switch does the trick, while the low position gives you a throaty, resonant tone for synth-y lower string sweeps.

Verdict

The Cry Baby Mini injects new life into the age-old wah formula, and any complaints we have about the lack of LEDs, the ease of battery access and the internal voicing switch pale into insignificance when you consider the boutique-level tone and high-quality construction on display. For downsizers, mini-'boarders and anyone searching for a reasonably priced, classic-sounding wah, the CBM95 is a must-try. **[MB]**

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: The Mini's size does nothing to diminish the Cry Baby legacy thanks to top-class sounds and functionality

VIDEO DEMO

<http://bit.ly/guitarist393>

Avian Skylark Fan Fret £1,199

The radical Skylark gets more radical...

CONTACT: The North American Guitar **PHONE:** 0207 835 5597 **WEB:** www.avianguitars.eu

Everything about Avian seems cutting-edge. British-owned with a head office in Hong Kong, the instruments are made in China but designed by US luthiers Michael Baskin and Harry Fleishman. Its range of instruments is characterised by the innovative and the downright quirky, especially this Skylark (first reviewed in issue 386), with its modernistic design, unusual soundhole, armrest and demi-cutaway. Here, however, another forward-looking concept is introduced: fan fretting.

The fan fret concept is not as daft as it may appear (and can apparently be traced back to the 16th century). Instead of a regular guitar's single scale length, like a piano the scale increases from treble to bass. So here, for example, we go from a standard scale of 25 inches on the treble side to 25.75 inches on the bass string, which accounts for the offset bridge and nut angle and the resulting 'fanning' of the frets.

Sounds

Some argue that ergonomics and playing comfort are improved, but the startling difference is in the tone created by a more uniform tension across the strings. The definition of harmonics is enhanced, and non-harmonic overtones and unwanted noise are diminished. The G and B strings – the point at which the change from wound to plain strings occurs – is often a problem area for intonation and tuning. This is seemingly improved by the more even tension. In addition, the envelope of decay is stretched too, giving quite a different, conveniently, piano-like quality to the sustain.

This model is fitted with the B-Band A2.2 dual-source

pickup, and it's not without issues. There's a transducer under the saddle (UST) and another on the underside of the top (AST). A preamp is Velcro'd inside, next to the battery, and a pair of discreet controls – for volume and balance of the two sources – are mounted on the inner rim of the soundhole. The restrictive shape and size of the hole, however, makes it impossible for this writer to reach into the guitar to remove/replace the battery or the preamp. Initially, we found the signal to be a little thin and a little noisy, though not unusably so. The application of some smaller hands, however, allows the preamp to be removed and the outputs of the two pickups adjusted, which immeasurably improves the sound.

Verdict

The vanilla Skylark impressed in our earlier review. Imaginatively designed and beautifully built, the instrument is very refined and if an instrument can actually improve your playing, this one did! Built with scant regard for the past, the whole ethos of this guitar is unapologetically forward-looking and that is gloriously apparent in its sound: where it counts. The fan frets may seem unconventional, intimidating, even pretentious – but from the outset, chord shapes simply fall under our fingers and the clarity of tuning and sound that multi-scaling achieves is beautiful. For this reviewer, the fan-fret idea absolutely sells itself. [JK]

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: Other fanned fret instruments are available, but not at this price: an eye-catching and relatively affordable way to test the concept

