



Fender Blues Deluxe & Blues DeVille reissue combos £599 & £899

It's a warm welcome back for two not-so-old favourites from Fender's back catalogue by Nick Guppy

Back in the early nineties, Fender's guitar amplification line was in danger of running out of steam. Following the closure of the legendary Fullerton facility and with it, the last of their hand-wired production models, Fender's lacklustre range at that time was losing market share to competitors who were already exploiting a trend for vintage tweed styling, combined with

contemporary features. Hence the debut of the original tweed Blues range in 1993, which saw Fender rightly asserting that if players wanted a real tweed amp, then it was the only name that should be on it. These amps have since evolved into the hugely popular Hot Rod range, with the addition of the 'More Drive' button. However, there are many players who still crave the



★★★★★
Guitarist
CHOICE



In both instances,
a no-nonsense
footswitch is included

The clean channel on both amps is pure classic Fender, with sweet highs that can cut through without sounding shrill

fatter, warmer tone of the earlier version, and Fender has now reissued the two most popular circuits in the original format: the 40-watt Blues Deluxe and the 60-watt Blues Deville.

With all due deference to the company that basically invented the guitar amplifier, original Blues Deluxes and DeVilles weren't among the best-made amps that Fender ever produced. Like most other volume manufacturers, in the early nineties, Fender was struggling to find consistent and reliable valves, and this caused many units to suffer from excessive mains hum and erratic performance. UK models were also prone to overheating mains transformers, which often exposed dry solder joints or other component weaknesses over time. However, a lot of electrons have passed under the bridge since then and the build standard of these reissued versions is considerably improved.

The tough-ply cabinets of both amps are neatly covered in real tweed cloth, which combined with the chrome control panels and chicken-head knobs certainly evokes the vintage Fender vibe that's still so popular today. The un-lacquered tweed covering may be a little bright for some eyes, but for those who want a more worn look, it's also

thankfully very easy to 'relic', using thinned matt varnish to dull and darken the fabric to taste.

Inside the steel tray chassis, most of the electronics are contained on two robust circuit boards which are double-sided and through-plated; the valves are chassis mounted, with long-tailed bases connecting to the PCBs, and all of the wiring is neatly bundled and tied back.

Both amps have identical control panels featuring dual high- and low-sensitivity inputs feeding either a single volume control for the normal channel, or drive and master volume controls for the overdrive channel. Both channels share a standard three-band EQ, as well as presence and level controls for the amp's built-in reverb spring, while a pair of sockets labelled preamp out/power amp in serve as a useful series effects loop. There's also a normal/bright switch that boosts high-frequency response – a handy feature for guitars with high-output humbuckers. Apart from mains and loudspeaker connections, all the controls, switches and jacks are mounted on the top surface for easy access, including a socket for the supplied two-button footswitch, although to get at the valves it's easier

to remove the rear panel, which has a CE-approved steel grille protecting the 6L6s from clumsy fingers.

It has to be said that one annoying original feature is the way the layout and control labels oppose each other – standing behind the amp, the writing is the right way up but the control functions are laid out backwards to the accepted norm of input on the left, followed by gain, tone, master, mains and standby. Viewed from in front, the controls are the right way round, but now the writing is upside down. It may be traditional, but it's still awkward. Thankfully, the control layout is straightforward and after a few minutes most players will be able to navigate it blindfolded.

SOUNDS: Switched on, one very encouraging characteristic is that both amps are virtually hum- and hiss-free. For several years now, all Fender valve products have been fitted with matched output valves supplied by Groove Tubes, and we're in no doubt this has been a major step forward in improving consistency and reliability, as well as tone. Lack of noise is one sure sign of a happy circuit that's going to sound good, and neither amp disappoints – the clean channel is pure classic Fender, with sweet highs that can cut through without sounding shrill. The mid-range is warm but not overly peaky, and the bass is round and ➔

FENDER BLUES DELUXE	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★
■ WE LIKED Chock-full of classic Fender tone; excellent build standard; low noise	
■ WE DISLIKED The backwards writing on the control panel	

FENDER BLUES DELUXE REISSUE COMBO

PRICE: £599

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: All valve, two channel combo with solid-state rectification

OUTPUT: 40 watts RMS

VALVES: Three ECC83/12AX7, two 6L6/5881 power amp

DIMENSIONS: 476 (h)

x 597 (w) x 267mm (d)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 22.5/50

CABINET: Birch ply

LOUDSPEAKER: One 12-inch Fender reissue Gold Label

CHANNELS: Two

CONTROLS: Normal channel volume, overdrive channel drive and master controls, bass, mid, treble, bright switch. Master presence and reverb controls

FOOTSWITCH: Two button footswitch (included) toggles reverb & channel switching

ADDITIONAL FEATURES:

Spring reverb, dual sensitivity inputs, extension speaker jack, preamp out/power amp in sockets

OPTIONS: None

Fender GBI

01342 331700

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www.fender.co.uk



The power amp in and preamp out sockets provide a series effects loop

FENDER BLUES DEVILLE REISSUE COMBO

As Blues Deluxe except...

PRICE: £899

OUTPUT: 60W RMS

DIMENSIONS: 597 (h) x 597 (w) x 267mm (d)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 22.5/50

LOUDSPEAKER: Four x 10-inch Fender blue Alnico

FENDER BLUES DEVILLE TEST RESULTS

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

■ **WE LIKED** Great sounding, well-built amp with plenty of power

■ **WE DISLIKED** Perhaps a little overpriced compared to the competition

The rivals

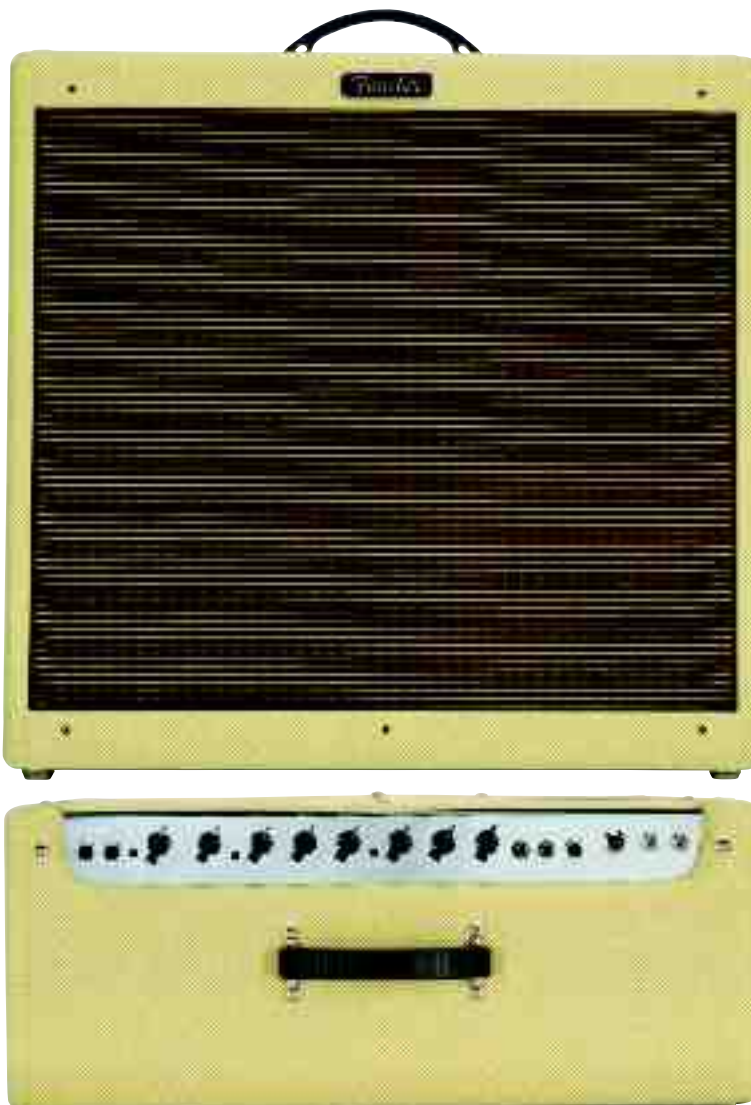
Marshall DSL401 combo	£539
Peavey Classic 50/410 combo	£769
Traynor Custom Valve 40	£499

Marshall's DSL401 continues to provide maximum bang for the buck in this closely contested price range with the trademark bite and snarl that typifies the legendary Brit brand. It's very portable and amazingly loud for its size too. Peavey's Classic 50/410 is part of the range the original tweed Blues were built to take on. Still highly popular after around 20 years, the Classics combine good build and cracking tone for a very tempting price, although the tweed is a vinyl replica it's still a good-looking piece and boasts similar features at a more competitive price. Traynor's Custom Valve 40 is definitely worth a try if you want classic styling and a gutsy, vintage-inspired tone. This Canadian firebrand packs an awful lot of wallop and it's particularly well-built

→ full. Plug in your favourite Fender guitar and you've got the full-on experience of what a great clean sound is all about. Use this channel with the volume control over the halfway mark and you get that classic characteristic Fender bite which demands that you dig in and hit the strings harder. It's a great tone which players used to controlling an amp from the guitar will make the most of.

The lead channel is also superb. The lack of the modern 'more drive' feature should not be seen as a drawback, as the smooth overdrive these amps generate is still plenty for most tastes. The best approach to wringing the hottest lead tones is to run the master volume as high as possible: this helps achieve an ideal balance between preamp distortion and power amp drive. Use a Stratocaster or Telecaster with this set-up, and you'll get a singing solo voice with plenty of punch and sustain – without the somewhat fizzy tone the Hot Rod's 'more drive' feature can sometimes tend towards. The EQ definitely favours single-coil guitars – the clang of a Telecaster's bridge pickup is faithfully captured, as is the 'quack' from the Strat's two and four switch positions.

Both amps have similar dual 6L6 output stages: the DeVille's higher output comes as a result of a higher plate voltage – 485 volts – while the




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Deluxe's is slightly lower at 431 volts. Of course, this difference in plate voltage is only part of the story: the Deluxe cranks its output through a single 12-inch driver, while the DeVille has four 10-inch Alnico loudspeakers, making for a more efficient array with a powerful mid-range bias. This leads to the two amps having different personalities, despite identical controls and circuitry. The Deluxe is perhaps a little more polite, smoother and controllable, while the DeVille works better for more aggressive playing styles, where you want your notes to leap out of the speakers and hit the audience right between the eyes.

Verdict

Perhaps some might think it a little odd that Fender has chosen to reissue two models from its more recent past. However, the Blues Deluxe and DeVille represent a significant turning point in the company's attitude – the Custom Shop was established at around the same time, with the subsequent

almighty hand-wired Tonemaster and Vibro-King re-establishing Fender as an amp brand that could mix it with the boutique boys on their own terms. However, it was predominantly the Blues tweed range that put Fender back on the amplification map for many working players.

Set against the obvious competition, these reissue versions benefit from all the lessons Fender has learned since the originals were introduced. Based on list prices, the Deluxe will be a particularly strong seller, while the DeVille is perhaps a little pricey, but you do get four Alnico drivers and a bigger sound to boot. They're bound to fly off the shelves, and everyone who wants the classic Fender tone and style should try them without delay. 

Fender Blues Deluxe reissue combo

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

Fender Blues DeVille reissue combo

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★