



# HUGHES & KETTNER BLACK SPIRIT 200

£879



Solid-state never sounded so good:  
meet H&K's latest ultra-versatile head

**W**hile smaller amp manufacturers can afford to specialise in digital, analogue solid-state or valve, the big-volume guys need a stake in all three to be truly successful; now Hughes & Kettner has distilled its considerable all-round experience into a new amp that might replace all of the above. The Black Spirit 200 is a compact, digitally-controlled analog amplifier, producing its sounds from something H&K call the Black Spirit Bionic Tone Generator, and delivering them via a whopping 200-watt power stage that can be tamed to 20 watts or even 2 watts for offstage use.

The list of features is impressively long: four channels called Clean, Crunch, Lead and Ultra with fully-programmable gain volume and EQ knobs and a boost, on-board digital effects, programmable effects loop and Red Box cabinet emulation, Bluetooth connectivity for audio streaming and real-time control from a mobile app, plus MIDI with phantom power to drive a floorboard with no need for

separate mains adaptors. The Black Spirit also offers a 'Sag' feature that replicates the squashed dynamics of coveted vintage valve amplifiers, together with presence and resonance controls, an aux in and a headphones socket.

That's a lot of functionality and Hughes & Kettner has done an excellent job of creating a head that looks smart and sexy, while keeping it easy to access and use all of those features. Hassle-free creation of great tones positively adds to the creative process, with extended manual-reading an optional extra. Based on the same format as the award-winning

cool as well as being highly practical on dimly-lit stages.

We tried out the Black Spirit using a variety of single-coil and humbucking guitars and we were seriously impressed with the amp's organic, rich tone and touch-sensitive dynamic response; while there aren't any valves inside it, you'd never know, especially when the amp is cranked up and cooking with a band. There's volume to spare for live use, while the low-wattage settings are great for practise and home use. The Red Box cabinet simulator is one of H&K's most well-known products and the Black Spirit features the latest AE+

## “H&K HAS CREATED A HEAD THAT LOOKS SMART AND SEXY...”

TubeMeister series, Black Spirit's tough steel chassis houses an immaculate, high-quality PCB design that's built to last, yet weighs in at slightly less than 4 kilos. The human interface is via H&K's trademark blue backlit Perspex control panel, which looks

version, which delivers highly authentic ready-to-rock sounds direct to recording desks, computers, PAs or in-ears. The Black Spirit's sounds don't disappoint, closely mirroring those of the amazing, valve-driven GrandMeister Deluxe 40.

### AT A GLANCE

**TYPE:** Analog solid-state/digital hybrid head w/ built-in effects

**OUTPUT:** 200 watts RMS, switchable to 20 watts and 2 watts

**CONTROLS:** Gain, volume, bass, mid, treble, presence, resonance, sag, master, channel select, loop on/off, FX access, boost, Red Box mic/line, on/off, output power select, guitar/FR cabinet select

**SOCKETS:** Guitar in, headphones/line out, MIDI in, MIDI out/thru, speaker out, Red Box DI out, aux in, loop send/return

**WEIGHT:** 3.6kg

**DIMENSIONS:** [HxWxD]  
155x410x150mm  
410mm

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### 1 SPIRIT TONE GENERATOR

The Spirit Tone Generator is the core technology responsible for the Black Spirit 200's highly realistic valve-like sounds and response. Looks pretty cool and sounds amazing

### 2 FOUR CHANNELS

The Black Spirit's four channels are completely analogue and fully programmable, with 128 presets. The mobile app talks to the amp in real time via Bluetooth







## Bionic Tone

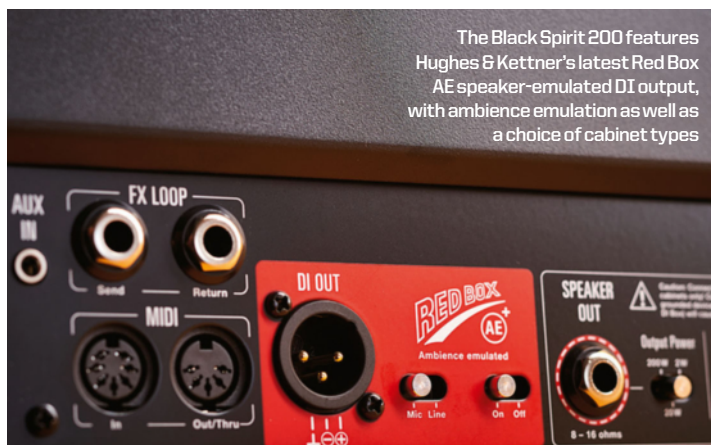
The technology behind the Black Spirit 200's core

Unlike a full digital modelling amplifier, Hughes & Kettner says the Black Spirit's core sounds come from analogue solid-state circuits under digital control. It's ironic that even the simplest valve circuits can take many lines of code and thousands of transistors to recreate in the digital domain; high voltage means there are all kinds of complex interactions going on in between components, as well as the obvious ones that exist between output valves, transformers and loudspeakers. It's easy to make some varieties of transistors behave like valves, but controlling them dynamically so they can mimic things like power amp sagging isn't. H&K is keeping it to itself, but we have an inkling that this may be what's going on inside the Spirit Tone Generator.

The clean channel is possibly even better to our ears, with more headroom and sparkle to the highs and a snappier bass response. The Crunch, Lead and Ultra channels offer gain, more gain and insane gain, covering everything from blues and classic rock to modern metal and thrash with ease. The acid test with this kind of amp is to bypass all the effects, which often reveals rather lacklustre core tones, however, the Black Spirit 200 sails through this with ease. The basic sounds are excellent, with the Sag control adding a valve-like dynamic response and



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The Black Spirit 200 features Hughes & Kettner's latest Red Box AE speaker-emulated DI output, with ambience emulation as well as a choice of cabinet types

realism. Things just get better as the onboard digital effects are added; the Black Spirit 200 offers spaced-out delays, lush modulations and impressively realistic reverbs, which can all be selected and controlled from the front panel, or fine-tuned from the Bluetooth app in real time.

The Black Spirit 200 head is a brilliant addition to the H&K catalogue, offering the sonic depth you'd expect from valves with none of the usual drawbacks. It's a great choice for those 'grab and go' gigs, when you're not sure what kind of backline to expect, while the tones

have enough authority to satisfy any player, from bedroom hero to pro artist. The floor controller and carry bag are both indispensable, however, Hughes and Kettner have kept them as optional extras, costing £185 and £37 respectively. Still, we think the Black Spirit offers good value for money.

**Nick Guppy**

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

## ALSO TRY...

### MARSHALL CODE 100

£279

Looking at the price difference it's easy to see why Marshall's Code range is so popular; the Code100 certainly has plenty of power for live gigs.



### VOX MVX150H

£739

Vox's MVX150 head uses clever Nutube miniature valves to generate its valve tones. A 150-watt power stage and digital reverb makes a very tempting package.



### BLACKSTAR ID:100 TVP

£384

Blackstar's big ID:100 head boasts True Valve Power, which means it's as loud as a valve circuit with the advantage of programmability and digital effects.

