







## MESA ENGINEERING MARK FIVE: 35 HEAD & MARK FIVE: 35 1X12 COMBO £1,749 & £1,949

Mesa expands its Mark Five range, building on the recent success of the Mark Five: 25 with this higher wattage newcomer powered by four EL84s

**Words** Nick Guppy **Photography** Neil Godwin & Olly Curtis

### What You Need To Know

#### 1 How long has the Boogie been around now?

The Boogie story dates back to the late-60s, when founder Randall Smith modified Fender Princeton practice amps to take a 100-watt power stage and a high-power Altec or JBL 12-inch loudspeaker. He also developed the first cascaded-gain preamplifier, creating today's singing distortion.

#### 2 What's the CabClone?

It's Mesa's own speaker-emulated, direct-to-desk output device that produces realistic impressions of mic'd up speaker cabs. It's included in several Mesa amps, and can also be purchased as a standalone unit.

#### 3 What about the EL84 valves?

The EL84 is a small pentode, originally made in Europe for radios and portable record players, then used in several smaller guitar amplifiers. It's basically a low power version of the EL34. Mesa were among the first USA builders to use it in large numbers.

**C**reated by company founder Randall Smith in the late-1960s, at a time when all self-respecting guitar slingers aspired to play through a stack the size of a Volkswagen Camper Van, the original Boogie combo has evolved considerably from its Princeton roots. The current Mark Five has over four decades of research and development behind it, and is one of the most coveted of all backline amplifiers. Recently, Mesa has expanded the range with a choice of output stages, adding a 25-watt EL84-powered head that has proved so popular there's now another new model, with four EL84s instead of two: the Mark Five: 35.

Based on the same chassis and cabinet dimensions as other Boogie amps, the Mark Five: 35 head and combo are identical in terms of features – the only difference is the cabinet size. The electronics live inside a fan-cooled aluminium chassis, with most components sat on three high-quality printed circuit boards. While earlier Boogie PCBs were hand-designed and laid out by Randall Smith himself, the Mark Five: 35's layout is generated by CAD, probably due to the increased component density. Nevertheless, you can still see some of the quirks that date back to the early Mark II

and Mark I eras. There's a lot of switching going on; we counted no less than 22 relays.

The control layout is similar to that of the Mark Five: 25, but with a few extras. There are two entirely separate channels, with gain, bass, mid and treble, master volume and presence knobs. Both channels have three very different voice options. The upper channel's choices are Clean, Crunch and Fat, while the lower deck is where the high-gain sounds live, with MK IV, MK IIC+ and Xtrema, referencing classic and modern Boogie lead sounds.

The famous Boogie five-band graphic EQ can be pre-set to on, off or auto, and both channels enjoy Mesa's Multi-Watt power option, offering a choice of 10 watts, 25 watts or 35 watts, and a footswitchable Solo volume control per channel. The rear panel includes Mesa's excellent CabClone speaker-emulated direct output, together with separate channel reverb level controls, a series effects loop and a headphone output. There's also a DIN socket for the supplied footswitch.

Both the combo and head exude quality from every angle. Typically high standards of Mesa design and craftsmanship mean the Mark Five: 35 will look good and stand up to years of road use at any level.





## The Rivals

PRS's Archon range has turned a corner for the guitar builder, and captured a significant chunk of the modern rock market. The 100-watt head has two very toneful channels and retails for around £1,650. Hughes & Kettner's GrandMeister 36 head sells for around £960 and has more features than almost any of its competitors, including full MIDI control over everything. For not a lot more money, Bogner's coveted Shiva 1x12 retails at around £2,250 and after 20 years of evolution, it remains one of the best-sounding amps money can buy. If you're beginning to think that perhaps something simple might be more up your street, Tone King's stunning Royalist 45 MK II can be bought in combo format for around £1,999.



1. The 35's two-channel control panel is simpler than the Mark V, but there's still an impressive feature set, with six different voice settings, the assignable and footswitchable graphic EQ and separate output power options for both channels
2. There's an enhanced version of the CabClone direct-to-desk output, with three speaker emulation choices
3. Both channels have a separate footswitchable solo control. It's wired in parallel with the channel master, so unlike typical solo level controls, it can be used to lower the volume as well as raise it
4. The included four-button foot controller features a clever solo 'preview' function that tells you if the solo level is active or not
5. The combo's single 12-inch Celestion Custom 90 'Black Shadow' driver will take care of any live gig



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## Sounds

The Boogie's smooth-acting tone controls have a wide range, making it easy to find a sweet spot for practically any guitar. The mid control has a much-extended range, with settings above five acting more like a mid-boost. The lower gain settings on the upper channel sound superb. Clean is a very sweet 'blackface'-inspired tone with lots of headroom and sounds great with pedals. Fat pushes up the midrange for subtle drive tones with a very touch-sensitive bite, while Crunch adds more gain for a gutsy, powerful drive sound that cleans up well with the

The CabClone direct output makes direct-to-desk connections child's play, either live or in the studio, and powers the headphone output

guitar's volume control yet retains plenty of drive and sustain for solos.

The lead voices on the lower channel add even more gain: MK IV does a good job of emulating the rounder midrange punch of the classic Boogie lead sound, while MK IIC+ faithfully reproduces the edgier scream of the late-80s Mark Series, which has become the most sought after for modern rock soloing. This voice would satisfy any gain fiend, but the final Xtreme voice really pushes things over the edge, with a blistering, fast attack, tight bass and razor-sharp treble. All the sounds are highly usable, the only black mark being a noticeable 'pop' when switching channels.

The famous five-band graphic EQ can be pre-set to either or both channels or activated from the footswitch, while both channels also have three power-output settings, with a choice of 10, 25 or 35 watts, making it easy to mix preamp gain with power amp drive.

The reverb is smooth, with a long decay that enhances sustained notes, while the refined CabClone direct output makes direct-to-desk connections child's play, either live or in the studio, as well as powering the headphone output. The combo, with its single 12-inch Black Shadow driver, is easily loud enough to handle any live gig, while the head





6. The CabClone also offers a ground lift and a speaker defeat, which leaves the headphones output active for silent recording

7. That famous EQ is footswitchable and can be preset to affect either or both channels

combined with a decent 2x12 or 4x12 adds even more level and spread.

### Verdict

While the flagship Mark V is truly astounding, it's a complex beast. The Mark Five: 35 is easier to use, without sacrificing anything tonally. The extra power over the 25 adds headroom to properly define its exquisite clean tones, with all the punch and cut you need for a great solo sound, and like all Boogies, it's relatively portable. Mesa hasn't always had great success with its EL84 designs, but the recent Mark Five: 25 and Recto-Verb Twenty-Five scored consecutive bullseyes in every respect, as does the Mark Five: 35. The sounds are stunning; it performs almost perfectly and is built to last forever.

Of course, such excellence doesn't come cheap and at nearly two grand, justifying the cost to significant others may not be easy. However, where there's a will, there's usually a way. At this level, there's plenty of stellar competition, too, but only one amp has 'Boogie' on the grille. If you've been waiting for the perfect blend of Boogie tone and Mark V features, the 35 has your name on it. **A**



### MESA ENGINEERING MARK FIVE: 35 HEAD

**PRICE:** £1,749

**ORIGIN:** USA

**TYPE:** Valve preamp and valve power amp

**OUTPUT:** 10, 25 or 35 watts RMS depending on channel selection

**VALVES:** 6x 12AX7, 4x EL84

**DIMENSIONS:** 230mm (h) x

480mm (w) x 275mm (d)

**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 12.5/27

**CABINET:** Birch Ply

**CHANNELS:** 2, footswitchable

**CONTROLS:** Ch1/2: Gain, bass, mid and treble, presence, master volume, solo volume, reverb (on rear panel), voice select, output select, EQ select, 5-band graphic EQ

**FOOTSWITCH:** 4-button switch switches channels, EQ and solo functions

**ADDITIONAL FEATURES:** CabClone speaker emulated direct out, series effects loop, headphone output

**OPTIONS:** A wide range of custom finish options is available; contact dealer for details and pricing

**RANGE OPTIONS:** The flagship Mark V costs £2,599 in combo format or £2,449 as a head, while the Mark Five: 25 is £1,399 (head only)

**Westside Distribution**

**0844 326 2000**

**[www.mesaboogie.com](http://www.mesaboogie.com)**



### MESA ENGINEERING MARK FIVE: 35 1X12 COMBO

**PRICE:** £1,949

**ORIGIN:** USA

**TYPE:** Valve preamp and valve power amp

**OUTPUT:** 10, 25 or 35 watts RMS depending on channel selection

**VALVES:** 6x 12AX7, 4x EL84

**DIMENSIONS:** 460 (h) x 475 (w) x

290mm (d)

**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 20/44

**CABINET:** Birch ply

**LOUDSPEAKER:** 1x Mesa 12"

Black Shadow

**CHANNELS:** 2, footswitchable

**CONTROLS:** Ch 1/2: Gain, bass, mid and treble, presence, master volume, solo volume, reverb (on rear panel), voice select, output select, EQ select, 5-band graphic EQ

**FOOTSWITCH:** 4-button switch switches channels, EQ and solo functions

**ADDITIONAL FEATURES:** CabClone speaker emulated direct out, series effects loop, headphone output

**OPTIONS:** A wide range of custom finish options are available, contact dealer for details and pricing

**RANGE OPTIONS:** See Mark Five: 35 head options, opposite



8/10

**PROS** Same controls and features as combo, great tone; not fussy on speaker types; easy to carry

**CONS** Need to buy a separate cabinet; loud pop when switching between channels

9/10

**PROS** Extraordinary tones, superb build quality and real-world features that all work really well

**CONS** It's expensive and, despite the compact dimensions, quite heavy; loud pop when changing channels