

GEAR

REVIEW

FENDER BASSBREAKER 18/30



FRONT-END

THE 18/30's simple control panel drives two different preamps into 18 or 30 watts of EL84 power, for a British take on some classic Fender sounds

CHANNEL SWITCHING

A single-button footswitch can be used to toggle the 18/30's two channels – there's also a handy push button switch on the control panel

**AT A GLANCE**

TYPE: All-valve preamp and power amp with solid-state rectification

OUTPUT: 18W or 30W dependent on channel selection

SPEAKER: 2x12" Celestion V-Type

VALVES: 2x 12AX7, 4x EL84

CONTROLS: Channel 1: volume, bass, mid and treble; Channel 2: volume and tone

SOCKETS: Input, main and extension speaker outlets, post-output stage line out, footswitch jack

WEIGHT: 22kg

DIMENSIONS: [HxWxD]

550 x 665 x 255mm

CONTACT: Fender GB

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SPEAKERS

THE 18/30's powerful tone comes from a pair of Celestion V-Type loudspeakers – great combo drivers with a detailed treble and classic British midrange

FENDER BASSBREAKER 18/30 £569

Fender's new amp range combines boutique features with a distinctly British vibe

THIS year, Fender marks 70 years of amplifier production, and what better way for the company to celebrate than by introducing brand-new valve amp range? The Bassbreaker series comprises four different designs, all with unique features, that combine the current trend for pedal-driven non-master volume amps with a definite nod to British products of the 1960s that were 'inspired' by classic Fender tweed circuits, such as the 4x10 Bassman. This month, we're looking at one of the most interesting amps from the new range, the Bassbreaker 18/30 Combo.

The 18/30 is only available in one format: a large and distinctly chunky 2x12 combo. The smart new styling includes cool features such as a special dark grey tweed covering, a 'block' Fender badge with an aluminium trim over the

black speaker grille carrying the Bassbreaker logo, and large custom pointer knobs. The solid ply cabinet houses two Celestion V-Type 12-inch loudspeakers, while the electronics are contained in a densely packed steel box chassis, which has an integral screen-printed control panel. The general standard of wiring

EL84 output valves – a classic British configuration. The twist is that channel one has all four output valves working for an output of around 30 watts, while switching to Channel 2 automatically switches out one pair, reducing the output to around 18 watts. There's a post-master line-out socket and a pair of

a PAF-powered Les Paul and an Ibanez archtop, plus a range of vintage and modern pedals. Right from the start, we're very impressed with channel one's sweet, airy clarity – it's supposed to be based on the 1960s 'Blackface' Deluxe, while channel two is inspired by the rare 1961 'Brownface' Deluxe – a transitional design that followed the classic 5E3 tweed version. Sonically, the 18/30 has its own thing going on, but there's definitely some of that Fender 'Blackface' magic on channel one, with a more defined midrange and bass. Channel two is warmer and more refined than the tweed amps, though the 18-watt power rating provides a gritty, aggressive tweed vibe when wound up.

Thanks to the pair of Celestion V-Type loudspeakers, this is one loud combo, and with no master volume it's not really for

It has that Fender blend of solid reliability and good looks

inside is good, and the Bassbreaker has that typical Fender blend of solid reliability and good looks.

This is a two-channel amp, but there's a twist: channel one has controls for volume, bass, mid and treble, while channel two has just two controls for volume and tone. Both preamps drive a quartet of

extension speaker outlets, together with a jack for the simple one-button footswitch that toggles channels, but no effects loops or push-pull switches – what you see is very much what you get.

We run the Bassbreaker with a variety of different guitars and pedals, including an old Strat,



Bassbreaking with tradition

What's in a name?
The all-new Bassbreaker range at a glance

Inspired partly by some of the classic 1960s British amps that themselves took their inspiration from vintage 1950s Fender designs, the new Bassbreaker range includes four different amps. First up is the single-ended 007 (head £210, combo £280), which is powered by an EL84 and delivers around seven watts of pure class A with a built-in treble booster. The Bassbreaker 15 (head £385, combo £470) has a pair of EL84s and features a three-position gain switch together with a balanced XLR recording output that offers switchable speaker emulation and a power amp mute. The Bassbreaker 45 (head £589, combo £819), meanwhile, uses a pair of EL34s and has a clever dual-linked preamp together with a continuous power attenuator that lets you select any output volume from 45 watts down to one watt. There are matching 1x12 and 2x12 extension cabinets at £210 and £350 respectively, too.

home or studio use. Both volume controls need to be up around halfway for things to start working nicely, at which point the 18/30 is one seriously powerful amp, easily loud enough for any size of gig.

The pedal response is excellent – channel one seems to be well suited to modern digital effects, while channel two seems to prefer boxes of a more analogue flavour. Paired up with an old delay unit and a treble booster, the lower power channel produces a really great lead sound that's definitely



The amp puts out 30 watts with all four of its EL84s cooking



The grey tweed covering is a nice mix of the classic and modern

more classic Brit than USA in flavour.

The most tempting part of the Bassbreaker is the price – under £600 for a Fender 2x12 combo is a pretty compelling reason to try one. We love the cool styling, vintage layout and quirky circuit design. It's definitely an amp for pedals, and we wish it had a pair of simple series effects loops – one for each channel – to control channels and effects with just one button. However, as it stands, the 18/30 is a great combo that looks set to win

a lot of friends. It's quite daring for Fender to stray this far from its more well-known territory with an entirely new range of amps; but the 18/30 would indicate it's on to another winner.

Nick Guppy

| SUMMARY | FEATURES | | | |
|----------------|-----------------|-------|--|--|
| | SOUND QUALITY | | | |
| | VALUE FOR MONEY | | | |
| | BUILD QUALITY | | | |
| | USABILITY | | | |
| OVERALL RATING | | ★★★★★ | | |

BLACKSTAR ARTIST 2X12 COMBO

£849

Blackstar's new 6L6-powered Artist 2x12 has a similar stripped-down vibe and layout, with channel switching and a great digital reverb. It's relatively pricey, but sounds terrific



PEAVEY CLASSIC 50 2X12 COMBO

£999

Peavey's often-overlooked Classic has been around for ages, mostly because it sounds great and is very reliable. Street prices are closer to £599, making the Classic 2x12 a real bargain



LANEY LIONHEART L20T 2X12 COMBO

£899

Laney's Lionheart series blends cool retro good looks with great tone. Four EL84s in parallel single-ended class A and unmatched loudspeakers make this a real

