

Model Behaviour





Marshall's much anticipated take on the digital modelling amp has finally arrived. But can it live up to the company's considerable heritage?

Words Nick Guppy Photography Joby Sessions

MARSHALL CODE25 COMBO & CODE50 COMBO £169 & £299

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What You Need To Know

1 What's a modelling amplifier?
A modern type of guitar amp that uses a DSP (Digital Signal Processor) chip to generate a wide range of preamp sounds and effects, with the convenience of programmability and stored patches. A modelling amp is usually connected to a sonically transparent power amp and specially designed loudspeakers to coax the best sounds from the preamp.

2 And what about MST modelling?
It's Marshall's own method of duplicating its legendary valve amplifiers in the digital domain. It's been developed jointly with Softube, who are the world leaders in software plug-ins for digital audio recording and music production, hence MST, which stands for Marshall Softube Technology.

3 And the Marshall Gateway?
This is a powerful app for mobile devices that connects to the Code amps using Bluetooth. It can be used to edit all the amp's parameters in real-time, as well as stream audio and edit/store all the patches. It's a brilliant piece of design – and actually easier to use than the Code amp's own controls.

Neil Young released an album with Crazy Horse in 1979 called *Rust Never Sleeps*. The words in this title ring true with technology, and it's just as relevant for guitar amps, as it is for television sets or mobile phones. In recent years, there's been a jump in the quality of digitally modelled sounds, with several manufacturers incorporating a Digital Signal Processor (DSP) front end into a head or combo format. Most major manufacturers now have a product such as this in their catalogue. One exception, until recently, was Marshall. But that's now changed with its latest debut, the all-new Code series, and here we place the spotlight on the Code25 and Code50.

Both Code amps have a sleek, modern look about them that's still unmistakably Marshall, with 'none more black' vinyl and grille cloth, topped by the famous white script logo. An anodised gold panel fitted with slightly squatter versions of Marshall's standard gold-top control knob sits in a cutaway on the cabinet top panel. All familiar stuff, which puts any

Marshall devotee at ease. The cabinets are a mix of particle board and MDF, with the electronics mounted on four PCBs. There's one for the built-in power supply screwed to the inside of the cabinet, while the other three are for the controls, digital preamp and solid-state power stage, all connected to the underside of the control panel. Everything looks typically neat, with minimal wiring between the boards.

On the Code50, we have familiar rotary controls for gain, bass, mid, treble and volume, which are all programmable, together with a non-programmable master volume and two more knobs to scroll through and edit presets. Sitting over the top of these knobs is a row of neat illuminated push-button switches, which access the Code's preamp, power amp and speaker cabinet models, along with the built-in digital effects.

Marshall has collaborated with software plug-in supremos Softube to create the amp models. There are 14 MST preamp choices, four MST power amp models and eight MST speaker cabinets, which can be





combined for an almost unlimited range of tones. There are no less than 24 digital effects, including overdrives, compressors, delays, reverbs and modulations, which can be used up to four at a time. As you'd expect, all the classic Marshall tones are represented, alongside some more USA-influenced sounds. The push-button switches also operate secondary functions including the guitar tuner, tap tempo setting for the delay and the Code's Bluetooth feature. There's a mini USB socket for connection to your computer

that's used for firmware updates and duplex audio streaming. Other panel connections include a single input jack for guitar, a 3.5mm aux in for mp3 players, a headphones socket that also doubles as a line out, and a jack for the optional four-button programmable foot controller.

The Code25 comes with a slightly rearranged control layout, with one knob doubling the preset and edit functions, together with a smaller LCD display. Otherwise, the controls and features are practically identical.

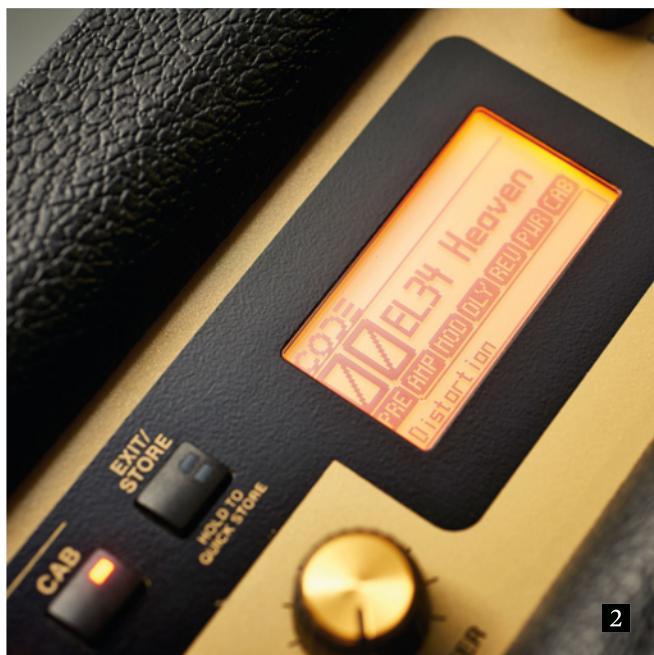
Perhaps the most interesting connection on both Code combos is the one you can't see, which joins the Code to any mobile device running Marshall's Gateway app, via Bluetooth. Gateway allows instant and precise editing of all amp parameters, as well as streaming audio from your mobile device to play along with.

Sounds

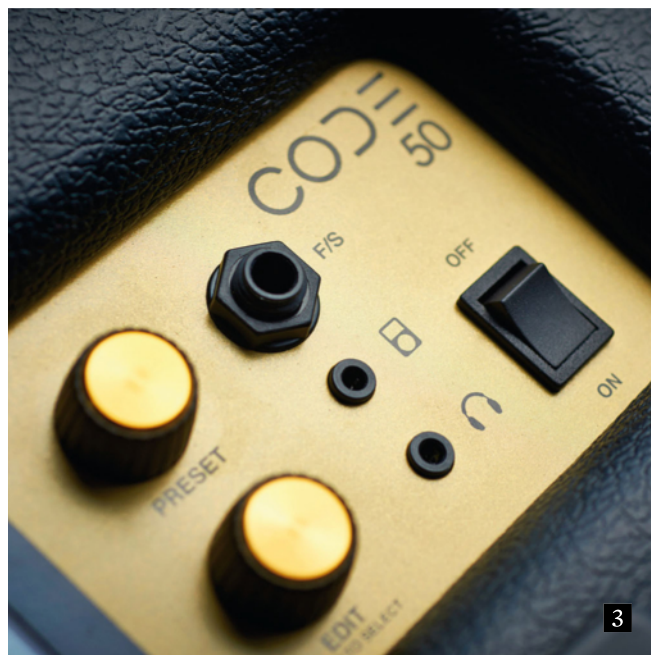
The first contact any potential buyer will have with the Code amps will probably be using the factory presets, and the Code's 'out of the box' sounds are mostly very good, with several excellent and immediately usable emulations of classic Marshall tones. The all-important preset 00 'EL34 Heaven', which is the first one most new users will hear, is instant guitar warrior self-gratification, with tons of distortion, sustain, reverb and delay blended into a truly epic solo sound! Meanwhile, preset 01 'Plexi Classic' is a superb stripped-back emulation of a 1959 Super Lead plugged into a 1936 cabinet, enhanced with a touch of room reverb, which we instantly put to use on a recording project.

The preamp, power amp and cabinet models are equally rewarding to use, while the Code's built-in effects generally live up to the same standard, with excellent studio-quality reverbs and delays. Some of the modulation effects could do with a little





2



3

Being able to edit, store and share your favourite patches on your phone is a great touch

more analogue warmth, but at the Code's price-point we're not going to complain.

The Gateway app works on Android and iOS platforms. We loaded it onto an iPhone running the latest iOS and hooked up to the Code50 using Bluetooth. Now, Apple isn't known for being particularly Bluetooth-friendly, but after a couple of false starts the Code and Gateway were talking to each other like old friends. We're highly impressed with the attention to detail that's gone into the Gateway app's design. The app controls all the amp functions seamlessly in real-time, increasing or decreasing parameters with a simple swipe action, or if needed a tap-and-hold brings up a key pad for precise value entry – handy when setting delay times. Calling up different amp, cabinet and effects models is intuitive and fast, aiding the creative process, as is the case with Gateway's audio streaming capability, playing back music stored on your mobile device to jam along with. Being able to edit and store your favourite patches on your phone and share them with other Code users is a great touch as well. The Gateway app makes the Code amps significantly more flexible and powerful. And it's easier to use than editing the amp directly off its control panel – once it's hooked up, it works without any issue.





2. The Code50's large backlit display is easy to read and has all the relevant info

3. Both amps are armed with a 3.5mm aux-in for mp3 players, while the headphone socket doubles as a line-out

4. The Code25's display is smaller, although we think users of both amps will mostly use the Gateway app





5. The push-button switches access the amp and cabinet models, as well as the digital effects. They have secondary functions, too, including the built-in tuner, tap tempo setting and the Bluetooth pairing

6. Familiar knobs on both amps control all the common amp features. They are all programmable, except for the overall master volume

The Code's USB socket is there to hook up to a PC or DAW for recording and transmits audio in both directions, as well as allowing users to update firmware. The mp3 input will work with any player that uses a 3.5mm jack, while the headphones socket also doubles as a handy line out.

The real-world sounds of both combos are slightly different. The Code50 is bigger and louder, with more bass emphasis, as you might expect from the larger sealed cabinet and 12-inch loudspeaker. It's certainly well up to handling most small-to-medium sized gigs, while the Code25's slightly more squashed frequency response and lower output makes it ideal for recording and home practice. A minor annoyance is that Marshall doesn't provide a foot controller with the larger combo, although it does for the 100-watt head and 2x12 combo versions.

Verdict

Fans of the Marshall sound no longer need to look to the competition for the best Marshall amp models – Code has them all, along with several others that combine for a limitless choice of sounds. The amps are logically laid out, good looking and keenly priced, while the cherry on the top has to be the Gateway app, which is unequalled for ease of use and design. With a range that suits beginners as well as working players, if you want the Marshall legend on a budget, then there's no real alternative. **G**



MARSHALL CODE25 COMBO

PRICE: £169
ORIGIN: Vietnam
TYPE: Digital preamp, solid-state power amp
OUTPUT: 25W RMS
VALVES: None
DIMENSIONS: 340 (w) x 350 (h) x 215mm (d)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 8/18
CABINET: Particle board/MDF
LOUDSPEAKER: 1x custom design 10"
CHANNELS: 1x programmable, with up to 100 patch presets
CONTROLS: Gain, bass, mid, treble, volume. Master volume, patch edit/scroll. Pre FX, amp, mod, del, rev, power, cab, exit/store buttons
FOOTSWITCH: 4-Way Programmable (PEDL-91009, sold separately, £39)
ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Built-in tuner, Bluetooth connection for Gateway app, USB in/out, mp3 player in, headphones/line out
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: Along with our reviewed Code50 1x12 combo, there's the 100 2x12 combo (£349), the 100 head (£289) with a matching 4x12 (£299)

Marshall Amplification
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8/10

PROS Generally excellent choice of amp and effects models; compact and very portable

CONS It's ideal for home practice and recording, but not enough power for live use



MARSHALL CODE50 COMBO

PRICE: £299
ORIGIN: Vietnam
TYPE: Digital preamp, solid-state power amp
OUTPUT: 50W RMS
VALVES: None
DIMENSIONS: 530 (w) x 440 (h) x 280mm (d)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 13/29
CABINET: Particle board/MDF
LOUDSPEAKER: 1x custom design 12"
CHANNELS: 1x programmable, with up to 100 patch presets
CONTROLS: Gain, bass, mid, treble, volume. Master volume, patch edit, patch scroll. Pre FX, amp, mod, del, rev, power, cab, exit/store buttons
FOOTSWITCH: 4-Way Programmable (PEDL-91009, sold separately, £39)
ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Built-in tuner, Bluetooth connection for Gateway app, USB in/out, mp3 player in, headphones/line out
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: See Code25



9/10

PROS The same very usable range of amp models and effects as the 25; plenty of power for gigs

CONS It's a real pity that Marshall has chosen to leave the foot controller as an extra