



FIRST PLAY



**SUPRO DELTA KING 12
1X12 COMBO**
£599

WHAT IS IT? A slightly modified version of Supro's 2019 Blues King that blends vintage styling and single-ended vintage Class A tone with a modern preamp that adds great versatility

Delta Muse

Supro's single-ended combo blends modern high-gain tones with vintage style

Words Nick Guppy **Photography** Olly Curtis

One of the original pioneers of electric guitar, the Supro brand dates back as far as the mid-1930s, although it was in the early 40s that Supro amplification really began to take off, riding on the popular wave of Hawaiian music. By the late 50s and early 60s, Supro was one of America's biggest names in amplification and can lay fair claim to being the sound of Chicago blues, as many prominent players from that era used its amps. Later on, this filtered through into mainstream rock, with Jimmy Page reputed to have used a Supro on many early Led Zep recordings.

The Supro brand disappeared in the late 60s and was owned for a while by Fender Custom Shop guru Bruce Zinky, who used it for a few limited-production runs. However, it wasn't until 2014 that the brand was fully revitalised under the ownership of Absara Audio, well known for the Pigtronix range of pedals. Last year, Supro and Pigtronix were



1



1. The Delta King 12's control panel mimics the original Supro style with traditional mains and standby toggle switches. The smaller toggles operate the amp's boost and drive functions, which can also be footswitched remotely

2. The custom-designed DK loudspeaker is unique to Supro and reputedly emulates the unique characteristics of field-coil loudspeakers that are found on very early Supro amps

bought by Bond Audio (joining D'Angelico Guitars in the stable), heralding the start of another exciting chapter for this historic brand. This issue, we're taking a look at an interesting combo from Supro's catalogue, the Delta King 12.

The Delta King draws on vintage Supro styling, with a flush front baffle and a truncated loudspeaker opening. The cabinet is made out of poplar, a lightweight and very resonant timber that's a 'secret sauce' for several top boutique builders. The covering on this sample is a fetching two-tone mix of black vinyl and a distinctive mustard tweed fabric, and includes four 'go faster' stripes that wrap around the cabinet from top to bottom. The loudspeaker onboard is a single 12-inch Supro DK75. It has been designed to approximate the tones of the field-coil drivers that would have been fitted to early era Supros but with modern power handling and reliability.

While the Delta King's styling is as vintage as you can get, the electronics are reassuringly modern



While the styling is as vintage as you can get, the electronics are reassuringly modern, with a robust steel tray chassis supporting two decently large transformers. Inside, most of the smaller components are mounted on a large high-quality through-plated PCB. This board also supports the front-panel controls and sockets for the Delta King's two valves: a 12AX7 preamp and a single 6L6 in the output stage. Component quality is good and you'll find that metal film resistors are used throughout to minimise hiss. As well as old-school valve electronics, there are several op-amps used for the Delta King's boost and overdrive, along with a small amp on a chip to power the spring reverb effect.

The top-panel controls are simple enough to get by with a cursory glance of the manual. Next to the input there's a volume

control followed by a pair of small toggle switches used to activate the Boost and Drive functions, followed by Treble, Mid, Bass, reverb level and a master volume.

On the Delta King's rear panel there's a footswitch socket together with a line out and power amp in. The line out is buffered and can drive another amplifier input or a console, while the power amp input allows you to use the Delta King 12's Class A power section with your choice of pedals or modelling preamps. This is an amp that looks the part and comes with solid build quality and decent components.

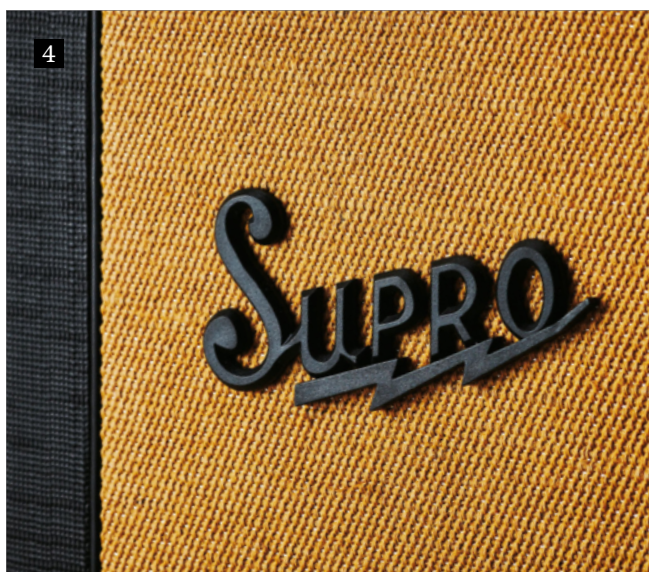
Feel & Sounds

We auditioned the Delta King 12 with our regular guitars: a Les Paul Standard fitted with old PAFs and a Strat loaded with Duncan Alnico Pro units. We also



borrowed a superb Gibson '63 ES-335 reissue – a certified blues machine that would have often been plugged into original Supros back in their heyday. Used without the solid-state effects, the Delta King is responsive and very dynamic, and has a warm midrange and restrained treble that work best with single coils and brighter PAF-style humbuckers. Turning up the volume and master controls adds a distinctive bite, not as aggressive as a tweed Champ maybe but with more clarity and plenty of attitude to enable us to pull off some authentically vintage-sounding blues solos with the 335.

Activating the Pigtronix-designed Boost and Drive effects catapults the Delta King forward several decades, the boost adding a fat greasy midrange and mild overdrive, while the overdrive adds serious gain for



3. Supro was one of the very first amp brands to feature a reverb effect, and the Delta King continues the tradition with a built-in spring for authentic vintage reverb sounds

4. The famous Supro lightning bolt logo sits on a highly resonant poplar cabinet, covered in a blend of orange tweed and black vinyl that pushes all the right vintage buttons for us



The boost and overdrive effects are footswitchable, all you need is a standard latching two-button switch to plug into the rear-panel socket. There's also a buffered line out and power amp input

Activating the Pigtronix-designed Boost and Drive effects catapults it forward several decades

more modern soloing styles, giving the Delta King enough heat to handle blues-metal and more. While the built-in effects are a good idea that saves using a couple of external pedals, it's a little disappointing that there's no individual control over gain and level. The boost level is just about right for stepping up from rhythm to lead, but some might find the high-gain overdrive a little too fierce for their tastes. The effects apparently borrow from Pigtronix's early Futuristic Analog Technology cascaded gain drive pedals, which means they're very responsive to player dynamics. The spring reverb is a little disappointing – it's fed with too much level and becomes irritatingly pingy at higher settings – but when used sparingly it adds a pleasant warm ambience to your sound.

Verdict

Supro fans may have already noted that the Delta King isn't far removed from the Blues King range introduced a couple of years ago, with the same controls and a similar set of tones. We still like the 'wolf in sheep's clothing' idea of a small vintage-styled valve combo that's capable of breathing fire at the touch of a button, and yet there's no proper control over the boost and drive effects; a pair of gain and level presets would have made a world of difference without adding too much to the cost. The reverb just needs a little more tweaking to reduce the input level and perhaps slightly brighten the tone, and to bring some of those bigger Americana sounds within reach.

With the effects switched off, the Delta King's warm Class A valve tones are more rewarding, and for Chicago-style blues it certainly sounds the part when cranked up. These minor gripes apart, this is a portable and potent small combo that's capable of enough volume to handle small gigs as well as practice and recording – and it's affordable, too, just like its 50s ancestors. If you want to channel some Delta mojo into your playing, check it out. **G**



SUPRO DELTA KING 12 1X12 COMBO

PRICE: £599

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Valve preamp and valve power amp

OUTPUT: 12W

VALVES: 1x 12AX7, 1x 6L6

DIMENSIONS: 430 (h) x 410 (w) x 190mm (d)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 13/28

CABINET: Poplar

LOUDSPEAKERS: 1 Supro DK12 12"

CHANNELS: 1

CONTROLS: Volume, Treble, Mid, Bass, Reverb, Master, Boost on/off, Drive on/off

ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Built-in spring reverb, footswitchable boost and drive

OPTIONS: Also available in black with white stripes

RANGE OPTIONS: The 1W no-reverb Delta King 8 costs around £399; 5W 6V6-powered Delta King 10 is £499

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8/10

PROS Built-in boost and drive features expand this combo's versatility, together with a traditional spring reverb; we like the vintage styling and portability, too

CONS The reverb is slightly over-gained and sounds pingy at higher levels; there's no individual control of boost and drive effects