

Quicktest

Welcome to Guitarist's regular round-up of the best of the rest of the gear that's passed through our hands this issue

Alesis PalmTrack £119

An affordable hand-held recorder

CONTACT: Numark Alesis Europe **PHONE:** 01252 896000 **WEB:** www.alesis.com

Alesis is known for its affordable prices and the PalmTrack portable stereo digital recorder is no exception, costing quite a bit less than the current competition. It's a battery-powered (mains adaptor optional) unit that records 16 and 24 bit, 44.1 and 48kHz wav files or 64-320kbps mp3 to an SD or SDHC card and features mic and line inputs and, unusually, four onboard mics. This array lets you choose to record in standard stereo with two mics, or to make all four active in omni mode and capture the sound from all around. Other features include a tuner and the ability to loop audio.



In Use

Light and definitely palm-sized, the PalmTrack is easily held in the hand, placed on a flat surface or attached to a camera tripod (there's an optional adaptor for a mic stand). With a simple set of controls it's very easy to operate and you can be recording within seconds of turning the power on. You can quickly choose two or four mics from the menu, with good-quality sound being recorded in both modes – perhaps stereo for recording gigs, omni for sticking the PalmTrack in the middle of a rehearsal room to capture the full sound of practices. Transfer of audio

files to computer is swiftly carried out via USB.

Verdict

If you're looking for a portable stereo recorder that's quick and easy to use that doesn't cost a fortune, the PalmTrack is worth checking out. [TC]

The Bottom Line

We like: Affordable; ease of use; selectable mic set-ups
We dislike: No dedicated guitar input

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Palmer PDI-CTC £453

Upmarket DI box with valves

CONTACT: Adam Hall **PHONE:** 01702 613922 **WEB:** www.adamhall.com

There are many instruments that are recorded by direct injection (DI) in a studio – that is, plugged straight in rather than using a microphone. Bass guitars are commonly DI'd, as are electro-acoustic guitars (often alongside a mic signal), and it's not unknown to DI an electric guitar for a clean sound. A DI box will take the Hi-Z signal from the guitar and convert it to an output level suitable for a mixing desk's mic input or a line input.

Now, while you can get DI boxes at real budget prices, at the other end of the scale you'll find the likes of this mains-powered Palmer DI-box and preamp, designed to get the best possible signal from your instrument.

In Use

The PDI-CTC's circuitry includes two valves, an ECC83/12AX7 and an ECC82/12AU7, and there are four three-way switchable bell-shaped filters (low, lo mid,

hi mid, high) to tweak your sound. Each of these can add, if needed, 4dB or 8dB in its respective range – this allows 81 EQ combinations, all altering the sound in a musical way. With the PDI-CTC's minimal signal path your signal remains pristine, enhanced by the pleasant sonic characteristics of valves alongside some subtle tone shaping if needed.

Verdict

Like all of the beautifully engineered Palmer gear we've seen, the PDI-CTC Tube DI doesn't sell for peanuts. But it's a great way to get an excellent clean signal from guitar to mixer/recorder. [TC]

The Bottom Line

We like: Classy signal path for direct sounds; musical EQ options; mic and line outputs
We dislike: Expensive

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Vintage Metal Axxe Wraith Bass £349

Mean, moody and very metal. Be scared...

CONTACT: John Hornby Skewes PHONE: 01132 865381 WEB: www.jhs.co.uk

If any guitar or bass visually depicts a musical genre then it has to be the appropriately named Metal Axxe models from Vintage. These are mean, moody and magnificent beasts that look as if they've come straight from hell, with a visual attitude clearly aimed at the heavy metal fraternity.

We get a glorious Helms Black Flame finish with a serrated body edge, like bites out of a slice of burnt toast, and with the severity of the sickle-like headstock, this bass is packed with visual attitude. But, being loaded with both a split-coil pickup and a single-coil, it can also deliver plenty of the right sounds.

Sounds

The Wraith certainly benefits from having Wilkinson-

designed pickups for this P/J configuration that's ideal for giving any hard rock bass player the cutting tones required.

Having active electronics is a huge boon and allows this bass to deliver throaty primal sounds with tons of attitude, but it also cleans up like a shaved hog. The bridge pickup adds the extra punch, but the blended sounds are naturally dominated by the solidarity of

the split-coil. There's plenty of tonal variation to hand and the active circuitry provides the muscle to deliver.

Verdict

If a picture paints a thousand words then this writes its own review. Love 'em or hate 'em, these metal monsters are a real fashion statement for those of that particular persuasion. But this sounds so good you could

happily use it in just about any band – looks aside. It simply does what it says on the tin, but quite magnificently. [RN]

The Bottom Line

We like: Looks; good feel; tonal punch; solid sounds

We dislike: No complaints

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Yamaha Pacifica PAC212VFM £329

The Pacifica continues its climb up the evolutionary ladder

CONTACT: Yamaha PHONE: 01908 366700 WEB: uk.yamaha.com

The new PAC212 range is, in effect, the same as the bread and butter 112V but with the inclusion of a thin but genuine maple top to both the alder body and headstock of the maple neck. Our example is flame maple – quilted maple is also offered – and is finished in caramel brown. Up close the woodwork is exemplary and the neck itself, thanks to its matt finish, is as comfortable to play as ever.

As with the 112V, albeit with the 212's electrics comprise an h/s/s configuration of Yamaha's own Alnico V pickups selected by a (rather stiff) five-way lever switch and controlled by single volume and tone controls – the latter doubling as a push/pull coil-split for the humbucker. Idiosyncrasies such as the black humbucker surround and snug

pickguard continue to allow the Pacifica to stand out from the rest of the crowd.

Sounds

We've covered many Pacificas over the years so we'll keep it brief here, but suffice to say that it's suited to most major styles. The humbucker can be a little brash if used with crushing levels of solid-state gain, but

rocks gamely nonetheless, while the coil-split and in-between settings give off a very good impression of Fender's finest.

Verdict

At £89 above the plainer-looking PAC112V, this PAC212VFM certainly adds a bit of posh, if you need it, to what is already a very good

guitar. Just like its plainer sibling, it punches above its weight in most categories. [SB]

The Bottom Line

We like: Excellent playability; build quality; versatile tones

We dislike: Nothing

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



T-Rex Fuel Tank Chameleon £155

So you need to power 9-, 12- and 18-volt pedals and a DL-4?

CONTACT: Westside PHONE: 0141 248 4812 WEB: www.t-rex-effects.com

There comes a time in every pedal junkie's life when the penny drops: cheap power supplies suck. Common failings include limited voltage options, not enough current, the wrong connectors, no Line 6-compatible or AC option, and of course the gentle sound of frying bacon through your amp. Relax – this remedies the lot.

In Use

The Chameleon puts out a total of 1500mA with up to 300mA off each isolated outlet. You can use up to five sockets at once, either separate pedals off each, or increase your total pedal count by daisy chaining same-voltage pedals off a single socket using the included lead – up to 300mA total load per socket, of course. There's a

proper IEC (kettle lead) mains inlet so there's no separate wall wart required, and the whole thing is compact enough to fit on top of a well-arranged board, or in this reviewer's case, velcro'd and cable tied on the underside of a T-Rex Tone Trunk. The included cable complement includes mini jack or BOSS-style centre-negative barrel adaptors.

Our lone criticism is that the straight power connector jacks would be more space efficient if they were right-angled. We're powering a bunch of common nine volters – wah, tuner, Tube Screamer, MXR Carbon Copy – plus a Fulltone Full-Drive II at

18 volts, a T-Rex Viper at 12 volts and a Hendrix Fuzz Face using a Virtual Battery adaptor by TheGigRig. No problems, and no fuss.

Verdict

Many players simply won't countenance £155 on a pedalboard addition that doesn't make a single sound. Others will realise that's

exactly the point here. Highly recommended for dedicated pedal punks. [MT]

The Bottom Line

We like: Versatility; no wall wart needed

We dislike: Connectors should have right-angle plugs

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Italia Retro 10 & 15 amps £62 & £84

Small practice amps with retro vibe

CONTACT: JHS PHONE: 01132 865381 WEB: www.jhs.co.uk

Trevor Wilkinson's love of all things past has created some of the most striking modern 'retro' guitar and bass designs around. Less quirky, but no less striking are these new Retro amps. Along with our duo on review a 25W version is also available at £129.

Very tidily made in China, these solid-state amps have sturdy cabs covered in red and cream textured fabric, silver/grey grille cloths, chromed corner protectors and old-style plastic handles. In a word, they're overbuilt.

Both have similar functions: single channels with overdrive/clean push switch and headphones output. The 10 features a single input, gain, volume, treble and bass with an approximately four-inch speaker; the 15 adds dual high

and low inputs and middle EQ control with a larger, approximately six-inch, speaker.

Sounds

The Retro 10 isn't the most expansive amp we've ever heard, but the clean mode is exactly that at lower volumes, getting nicely crunchy at full tilt. The EQ works well to vary your tones and the distortion, though raspy, has tons of gain and produces some fuzzy-edged old-school garage tones.

The 15 sounds bigger, a little louder, and with that additional mid-range control is a lot more versatile. The gain mode sounds smoother on this one too, and the dual inputs also provide the user with subtly different tonalities.



Verdict

It's the 15 we'd go for here; the 10 is neat but once you've heard the bigger sounding 15, you'd probably want to pay the extra. It's surprisingly versatile from clean through to heavy rock: a superb practice amp that'd hold its own in the studio too. [DB]

The Bottom Line

We like: Retro design; good range of sounds; price

We dislike: No external speaker socket

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★