

## Bench Tests

# Class A Acts

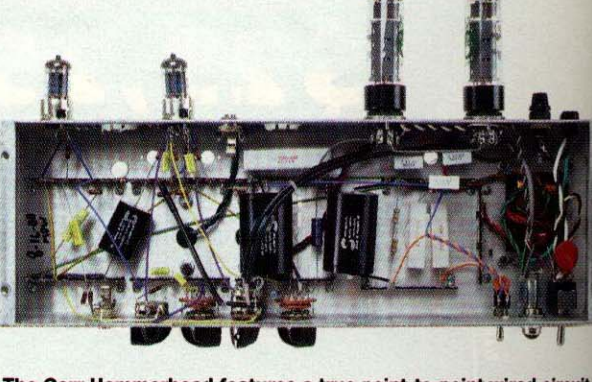
### Carr Hammerhead and Kingsley Deluxe 30

By Matt Blackett

**T**here's just something about class A amplifiers. Mention the Vox AC30, Fender Champ, or Matchless DC30 to a guitarist and it means something. Rightly or wrongly, we tend to believe that class A amps have more inherent chime, complexity, and vibe than most other amps. Maybe we got

that from listening to ultra-vibey Beatles, Derek and the Dominoes, and ZZ Top records.

The two amplifiers reviewed here employ class A designs in very different ways, but manage to end up at the same result—great tone. Both amps feature top-flight components and meticulous craftsmanship, and both



The Carr Hammerhead features a true point-to-point wired circuit.

#### Carr Hammerhead



#### Features

- Parallel tone controls: Impact and Grip
- Eminence-designed Carr Kingpin 60 12" speaker
- Dual EL34s

#### Snapshot

Two different spins on class A tube amp design, the Carr Hammerhead (\$1,395) and the Kingsley Deluxe 30 (\$1,750) are high-end, low-wattage amps that feature hand wiring, top-quality components, and several unique features. The Kingsley Deluxe 30 receives an Editors' Pick Award.

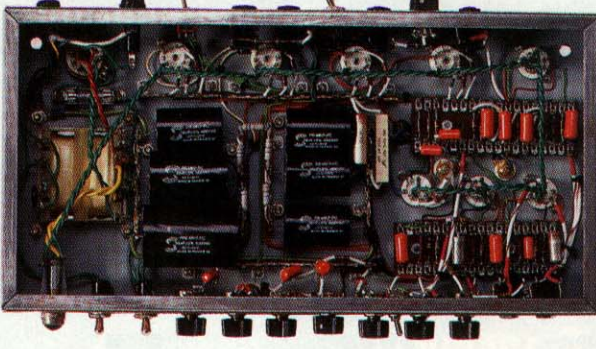
were tested with a Gibson Les Paul and a Fender Strat.

#### Carr Hammerhead

The first thing you'll notice about the 25-watt Carr Hammerhead (\$1,395) is how cool it

looks. With its fire engine-red Tolex and asymmetrical grille, the 35 lb amp conjures visions of early '50s radios. The top-mounted control panel features neat silk screening that's vaguely reminiscent of Orange amps.

The Hammerhead's innards are top-notch, with 100 percent point-to-point hand wiring, polypropylene filter capacitors (more expensive than electrolytic caps, but more durable and better sounding), two Electro-Harmonix



Neat handwired circuitry also graces the Kingsley Deluxe 30.

#### Features

- Dual inputs
- Master tone control
- Gain control (channel 1 only)
- 12" Celestion Greenback
- 12" Mojotone M12B
- Half-power switch
- Variable-level line out
- Footswitchable boost

#### Kingsley Deluxe 30



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EL34s, and an Eminence-designed 12" speaker. That's not all. You also get a super cool looking hospital-grade power cord, George L's cable for all internal wiring, and a solid pine cabinet. Everything about the Carr exudes quality and durability.

Despite its few features, the Hammerhead offers several useful tonal options. The volume and master knobs are self-explanatory, but the 4-position Impact and Grip controls are less intuitive. Before

explaining how they work, it is worth noting that the Hammerhead features *no* tone controls in the direct signal path. The Impact and Grip controls act in *parallel* to emphasize treble and bass frequencies, while leaving the pure amp tone intact. Whoa! Let's try that again.

**What Impact does:** This knob uses different capacitor values to vary the emphasis on upper mids and highs.

**How Impact sounds:** At lower volumes, switching the Impact knob to its second position pro-

### Contact Info

Carr Amplifiers, 433 W. Salisbury St., Pittsboro, NC 27312; (919) 545-0747; carramps.com

Kingsley Amplifiers, 21222 Dewdney Trunk Rd., Maple Ridge, B.C., Canada V2X 3E9; (604) 463-5201; kingsleyamplifiers.com

duces a subtle bright boost. Going from 2 to 3 creates the most dramatic change by boosting upper mids for a louder, brighter tone with more gain. Position 4 bumps the low mids in a very subtle way. Interestingly, at higher gain settings (anything above three

o'clock), the Impact control has no effect.

**What Grip does:** The Grip switch works by adding bypass caps around the cathodes of the phase inverter and the cathode bias output stage.

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The Ratings Game	Tone	Workmanship	Features	Vibe	Value
Carr Hammerhead	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★
Kingsley Deluxe 30	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★

The Rate-O-Meter: Dismal = ♥ —————> Excellent = ♥♥♥♥♥

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**How Grip sounds:** Once again, the biggest difference is between positions 2 and 3 where there's a big jump in volume, low-mid thump, and distortion. The other positions are so subtle they're nearly imperceptible. (Carr says that they've addressed this detail on recent models, and the settings are now more distinct.)

Plugging into the Hammerhead produces a rich, dimensional sound with great overtones and punch. Carr says that the amp was designed to produce power-tube overdrive at reasonable volume levels for hot blues, slide, and classic rock tones. They definitely make good on that claim. A Les Paul sounded fat and squawky at lower volumes, and drifted effortlessly into singing sustain with the gain up past halfway. A '50s Reissue Strat was bright and stringy—definitely bringing out more of the class A chime. Loud, clean headroom is not the Carr's thing, although the clean tones it does produce—by turning either the amp or the guitar down—sound great.

No matter what guitar was plugged into it, the Hammerhead was *very* quiet, even with both volumes cranked. It also remained beautifully dynamic, responding to changes in the guitar's volume and also to different picking attacks. At only 25 watts, you'd most likely have to mic it on a gig, but if you did, here's what you would get—a compact, lightweight amp that looks and sounds great.

#### Kingsley Deluxe 30

Representing a different take on the class A theme, the Kingsley Deluxe 30 (\$1,750) is a 2x12 combo with a bunch of useful features. At a glance, the Deluxe 30 has a stately, dignified air about it, with its blue Tolex, cream grillecloth, and engraved copper front panel. The gold piping is a nice touch, but it's uneven in some areas and the ends are a little rough. Likewise, the covering could have been applied more cleanly. These are minor cosmetic points, however, and have no bearing on the durability of this amp.

Opening up the Kingsley reveals an amazingly clean, hand-wired circuit with nothing but the highest quality parts—including expensive Solen filter caps, carbon-composition resistors, and heavy-duty transformers. Inside the Baltic birch-plywood cab resides a quartet of EL84s that delivers 30 watts to one 25-watt Celestion Greenback and one Mojotone M12B. The mismatched speakers were chosen to emphasize

the warmer breakup characteristics of the Mojotone. It really works—you can actually hear the speakers doing exactly that.

The front panel is straightforward, but with a couple of interesting twists. Aside from the bass, middle, and treble controls, there's a global tone knob, a bright switch, two input jacks, and controls for reverb, gain, and volume. The gain control is only operational when using input 1.

The Deluxe 30's back panel sports jacks for the variable line out, extension speaker, and included boost footswitch (which has a knob to vary the boost level so you don't have to run back to the amp—yeah!).

There are also switches for speaker impedance and half-power operation.

So how does this thing sound? In a word, awesome. Plugging a Les Paul into input 2 (bypassing the gain control) yields huge clean sounds at lower volumes, and excellent crunch as the volume increases. Strats sound gloriously detailed and zingy without ever getting shrill. The cleng and getting associated with the venerable Vox AC30 is spoken here. This is due in part to the Deluxe 30's beautiful-sounding EQ. Each control has a very musical voicing that produces pleasing results at even the

most extreme settings. The global tone knob lets you adjust the overall brightness without altering the relative levels of bass, mids, or treble.

Input 1 ups the distortion ante by putting the gain control back into the signal path. Anything from bluesy, low-gain sounds to full-on fuzz is available. My favorite setting was the gain at 12 o'clock and the volume cranked. Here, I was able to get any sound I wanted by simply manipulating my guitar's volume control.

The footswitchable boost makes the Kingsley an even more powerful gigging weapon, giving you another louder, brighter tone at your disposal. And, though this amp seems like it could keep up with a reasonably loud band, you can always use the variable line out to feed this great tone to a power amp—or even to another amp's input (just make sure you bring the level up slowly). For apartment dwellers, the half-power switch will prove to be a godsend. Oh, and one more thing—the reverb sounds amazing. Being able to combine some AC30 mojo with a lush reverb is a real treat.

The Deluxe 30's combination of top-quality components, useful features, and great tone adds up to one very impressive package. This amp is a must-try for anyone looking for a boutique combo with classic chime and potent grind. ■



You can adjust the boost level via the included footswitch.