

MAUGHAN MP21R COMBO

Boxing clever

MAUGHAN IS A NEW UK COMPANY AIMING TO OFFER THE ULTIMATE IN HIGH QUALITY ALL-TUBE GUITAR AMPS. **TIM SLATER** CHECKS OUT THE NEW KID ON THE BLOCK

... Guitarists are undoubtedly a funny lot – it takes something very special to lure us away from the established brands that you can find in the high street music stores. Perversely, smaller manufacturers sometimes find it easier to gain a toe hold in the field of bespoke guitar amplifiers where there is less competition and the customer's needs are more esoteric and less price-driven than the average punter.

Maughan Amplifiers is a British newcomer making tube guitar amps that are designed and built to very high specifications. Among the lengthy list of selling points is that the combo will accept all octal base output tubes, meaning that you can fine-tune the tonal characteristics of the amp to suit your individual playing style. And of course, there's much, much more...

PRE & POWER AMP

Bernard Maughan's engineering background reveals an almost scholarly approach to building amps that's obviously influenced by

pioneers like Leo Fender. Emulating the rubbery dynamics and punchy tone of a vintage tube guitar amp is one thing, but few genuine vintage amps can rival the impressive build quality and skilful design evident in the Maughan amp. The amp has a versatile choice of two different operating modes; high power mode delivers around 60 watts of output (pentode/tetrode) and a more studio- or small gig-friendly 20 watts in low power (triode) mode.

The preamp is housed in the top of the amp, in a strong 19-inch 2U-high stainless steel chassis that can be modified to fit into a rack if required. The chassis is well ventilated, with large air slots and plenty of space to let cooling air circulate freely around the chassis. The preamp and output stage both use tag strips for easy maintenance and it's obvious that a great deal of thought has gone into the design; even the bolts are made from non-magnetic stainless steel to help reduce the risk of extraneous noise caused by interference with powerful magnetic components such as the transformers.

The output transformers actually help to hold the power amp's

GBINFO

MAUGHAN MP21R COMBO

PRICE: £3,200

BUILT IN: UK

POWER: 60 watts in high power mode, 20 watts in low power mode

FEATURES: All-tube power amp and preamp, solid state rectifier. Single channel with footswitchable reverb and gain boost. Will accept most octal-base output tubes including 6L6, 5881, EL34, KT88 and 6550s. Bias test points, special design Accutronics spring reverb, effects loop with return level control, gain boost level control, dual speaker output jacks. 'DiffusionGrill' speaker grill, solid hardwood cabinet

SPEAKER: Celestion G12 Vintage 30

FOOTSWITCH: Maughan heavy-duty footswitch, supplied

WEIGHT: 35.5kg

DIMENSIONS: 310(d) x 530(w) x 540(h) mm

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Maughan

TRUSSED UP

SHOCK MOUNTED FOR LIFE WITH MUSICIANS

■ The Maughan's amp chassis is mounted on a pair of steel truss rods and a sub frame, themselves mounted on shock-proof suspension so as to isolate the valves from impact and vibration.

In fact, shock mounting is a key feature of the Maughan's internals: you'll find suspended bits of this and that everywhere that's thoughtfully designed and easy to work on. It's as much a piece of art as engineering!

extruded aluminium chassis together, similar to how an F1 engine forms part of the car's chassis, and the entire output stage is mounted at the bottom of the cabinet, entirely separate from the preamp section.

Preamp tubes are particularly susceptible to the everyday vibration that can cause unpleasant microphonic squeal, and the preamp and power amp's main sub frames are both fitted

"THE OVERDRIVE IS SWEET AND QUITE VERSATILE, WITH PLENTY OF GRUNT HERE"

with high-quality resilient mountings to defend vulnerable internal parts against vibration and knocks.

The Maughan combo's specially designed Accutronics spring reverb is similarly mounted and is also carefully aligned to avoid picking up interference from the mains



■ The middle pot can be switched off for simple bass and treble controls only

transformer. With a longer dwell than a standard Accutronics unit, the reverb signal path bypasses the tone controls, resulting in a very clean, deep-sounding reverb untainted by any colouration from the tone circuit.

The Maughan is a single-channel amp but there is a footswitchable higher-gain boost circuit with a useful rotary knob on the rear panel to help balance the boost volume against the non-boosted signal. For extra grit, the amp's front panel also includes an extra gain-boost button with a rotary gain knob to adjust the gain level. The combo FX loop has a rotary level control on the effects return (input) that blends the effects level with the amp's clean signal. This design is generally a more flexible way of controlling the effects level than the more common dual-mode attenuation switch used on many modern amps' FX loop circuits, offering far greater control.

CABINET & SPEAKERS

Our test combo's steamed beech cabinet is beautifully made and very strong, with a real high-end 'furniture' vibe about it. If you are interested, Maughan also offers the cabinet in a choice of ash, maple, cherry and even oak, none of which would look out of place in anybody's living room.

The single built-in speaker is the ever-popular Celestion G12 Vintage 30, tilted back five degrees to help direct the sound more toward your ears, rather than booting the signal straight past your legs. The amp's cool-looking art deco appearance is largely down to

the unusual looking extruded aluminium speaker grill. This grill isn't just chosen for its looks, though, and Maughan has even gone to the extra trouble of registering the unusual and attractive louvered



■ Yours for an extra £200 when you buy a Maughan combo. This is a cracking road case

pattern under the name 'DiffusionGrill', such is its alleged effect of widening the amp's sound pattern compared with standard speaker cloth.

SOUNDS

The Maughan amp's clean tones are nothing but inspiring. Like many amps of its ilk, it's essentially quite a simple design but tonally it isn't a one-trick pony. The amp has a lovely natural quality to it that provides a great springboard for any guitarist short of the most satanic of heavy metal players to obtain the tones through your own creativity and skill; although there are a couple of useful tools provided to help you dial-in favourite tones with a minimum of fuss.

The midrange pot on the amp's EQ section is really a variable mid boost with a midrange cut switch that eliminates the middle from the tone



GBREVIEW AMPLIFIER

MAUGHAN MP21R COMBO

DETAILS

HAND-BUILT WITH INCREDIBLE ATTENTION TO DETAIL... AND LOTS OF MONEY TOO!



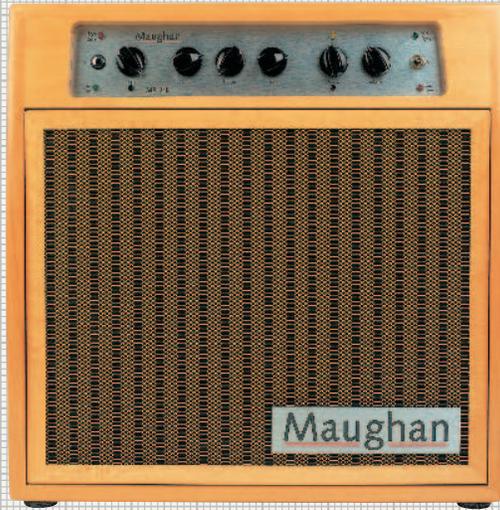
■ Experiment with any cabs, minimum 8 ohms



■ Now that's a footswitch! Ultra heavy duty



■ These are at the rear to keep the front tidy



GBCONCLUSION

THE PRICE MEANS MAUGHAN'S NOT FOR EVERYBODY, BUT JUST FEEL THE QUALITY...

■ With the ability to switch power tubes, the Maughan packs a lot of versatility into its outwardly simple shell. Players who prefer EL34, 6550 or 6L6 tubes (and others) can fit them into the amp as long as the bias is adjusted accordingly. Plenty of amps can do this too, of course, but far fewer have the instant bias adjust that makes it such a simple process with a basic voltmeter.

There's much more here besides; the incredible, innovative build quality, the split pre- and power sections, not to mention plenty of easily dialled tones. Virtually everything on this amplifier is purpose-built which means that it isn't exactly cheap. It does sound every bit as good as it looks however, and you can guarantee a personal touch to the pre- and post-sales service that's very rare. Hand-built and British, it's always going to be niche-market stuff – high-end studios, pro players looking for something truly different, and of course anyone with pots of money! We wish Maughan very well indeed. **GB**

GBOPINION

MAUGHAN MP21R COMBO

GOLD STARS

- ★ Superb warm, classic tones
- ★ Great build quality
- ★ Looks beautiful

BLACK MARKS

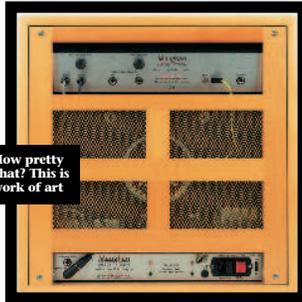
- Out of reach for most players in terms of price

IDEAL FOR...

Wedge toneheads who want something different

stack when the control is rotated anti-clockwise until it clicks. The tone controls' interactive nature makes finding usable sounds very easy, but to be honest we didn't really need to use them much beyond a little tweak; we just set everything about half-way, plugged in and played.

Low power mode makes it very easy to drive the output stage into a nice, warm squashy tone at a not unreasonable volume level and that deep, lustrous-sounding reverb adds a



■ How pretty is that? This is a work of art

lovely depth that sounds equally effective on gentle fingerstyle jazz chords and fast-picked bluesy runs.

The overdrive is particularly sweet and quite versatile, with plenty of muscular grunt available courtesy of the gain boost switch. While the Maughan is definitely not a hi-gain amplifier in the modern sense, classic rock fans who can exploit that lovely saturated tube power amp tone will really enjoy what's on offer. During a lengthy test period, we experimented with various different combinations of tubes in the output stage before finally settling on a pair of Electro-Harmonix 6L6s that we felt had the right combination of punch and bright glassy cut. This amp rocks.

TAG TEAM

THE OL' PCB VS POINT-TO-POINT CHESTNUT

■ Tag strips are a traditional way of mounting electronic components. They became much less common as cheap, mass-produced printed circuit boards became available.

One advantage of using tag strips to connect replaceable components on a hardy, custom board (or indeed chassis-mounted stuff) is, obviously, easy maintenance. Complicated PCBs with minute solder joints and tiny components often have to be replaced entirely if there's a problem. So, for example, if your power tubes are cheap-board-

mounted and you have one go down in spectacular fashion, it can mean replacing the whole board. Chassis-mounted with tags, it usually means just replacing the one tube socket. In the case of the Maughan, we have ceramic tube sockets which are far less susceptible to tube failure damage. Arguments persist that amps with total point-to-point wiring sound better than their PCB counterparts and purists often insist on them. This is a very thoughtful, quality half-way house that looks great to us.