

Carr Rambler Guitar Amp



Finding the perfect combination of tone, presence and portability in a guitar amp can be elusive. We guitarists always whine about the giant amp that sounds incredible but is stuck in the living room because it's too heavy to drag around. Or that great lightweight amp that works fine in an intimate setting but doesn't have enough beef to take care of business. Tubes? That's extra weight and bulk, but solid state can sound so cheesy.

Size vs. sound, even in this day of microchips and super-miniature construction, is an issue that continues to plague the jazz guitar world.

Which brings me to the Rambler, by Steve Carr. This is a hand-wired, high-end tube amp, with switching between triode (low power) at 14 watts, class A, and pentode (full power) at 28 watts. I tried the triode sound first, and found it to have a decent dirty blues sound, though at a low volume it seemed weak in the low and low-mid frequencies. At a higher volume the amp had a nice compact crunch. A light harmonic distortion at all volume levels makes it a good sounding basic blues amp in this triode setting. Although I found it to be a little bright, there was a good separation of the voices and I could distinguish each note clearly.

The pentode setting was my favorite. Carr's literature stresses warmth and clarity in his amps, and in this setting the Rambler certainly lived up to the claims: pentode mode packs a wallop. It is clear and warm in the mid and upper registers, once again with good voice separation. I was a less satisfied with the low end: it seemed a little weak or mushy. In pentode mode there was plenty of power, but watch out for a nasty distortion in the low end at high volume.

The Rambler has only one input jack, which could be a blessing or a curse, depending on who wants to sit in when there is only one amp. I noticed very little speaker hiss from the amp with nothing plugged into it. The difference in tone between soft and loud volumes

was pretty drastic, more than is usual for a small amp. That took some getting used to, but the tremolo and reverb effects are absolutely killin'!

The more I played the Rambler, the more I liked it. It's a good, small, high-end

club amp (don't bring it to the Hollywood Bowl), which at 21 inches wide, 17-1/2 inches tall and 10 inches deep has an excellent size-to-tone ratio.

—Paul Bollenback

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