

No. 7 and No. 8 in a 1x12 combo format as soon as I can get it photographed and issue a press release. Ah the joys of being a one-man shop...

REVIEW

# Amplifier Number 8



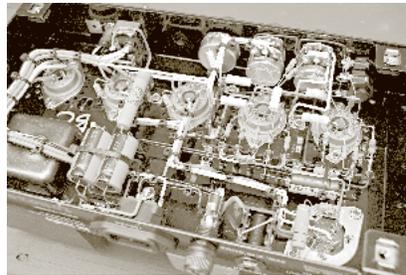
While you can milk 'clean' tones from No. 8, they are clean in the style of a plexi amp at moderate volume

levels rather than Fender 'clean.' In our opinion, No. 8 is all about crank and drive. Imagine a 25 watt dual 5881 vintage Marshall that sounds much bigger, richer and less compressed than any 18 or 20 watt Marshall or clone you may have heard, and that's Amplifier No. 8. Like No. 7, there isn't a bad tone to be found in this amp, whether you jack the Drive control and throttle the Volume down for low volume, high-distortion and sustain, or aim for a bigger, less distorted voice with the Volume set high and the Drive cut. One of our favorite settings was Volume and Drive set at 12 o'clock. Why does



Clement's No. 8 sound so thick and juicy? Well, you'll notice there is no tone stack to speak of... The Presence

control works in the power section to create a sharper tone at higher settings, or a darker, heavier sound set low. The 5881 Tung-Sol output tubes create a bigger, more open and less compressed tone than EL-84s or EL-34s, and the 6SL7 octals develop intense distortion and vivid overtones that remind us of a mid-'50s Gibson GA-20 reviewed here and christened the 'Cooderizer.' We ran No. 8 in our 16 ohm 2x12 oval open back cabinet loaded with a Celestion G12H30 and a Warehouse Veteran 30, and the sounds pouring forth can be described as huge and magnificent with tremendous low end, mids, and a super smooth treble voice. No. 8 is a fatty, pure and simple, and you could literally throw it in a carry-on bag for your next festival gig in the Netherlands, no problem. Really? Yeah, it's plenty loud enough to be miked for a big room, although if you need to fill a big outdoor stage you'll need a little help from the monitors. Don't laugh... Jeff Beck did it with a Pro Junior, didn't he?



No. 8 features one input with standby, Presence, Volume and Drive controls, and a single 8/16 ohm speaker input. Add a great guitar, some decent

chops and an effect or two (you won't need any help with distortion) and you couldn't possibly do any better for totable, easy-on-the-ears hard rockin.' *Rock forth...to*

[www.bcaudio.com](http://www.bcaudio.com) 415-310-3087

# Carr Sportsman



When we first featured Steve Carr and his amplifiers in our February 2001 cover story, the custom amp business was far easier to grasp than it

is today. To be perfectly honest, on more than a few occasions over the past 12 years we have wondered aloud, "Who is buying all this stuff?" Has the number of booteek amp builders doubled and trebled as a result of a static core of ampoholics doubling down on multiple amps, or has the market simply kept pace with supply and demand as more guitarists have jumped on the boutique bandwagon? Think about it... everybody needs a refrigerator, few need two, but how many amplifiers are 'enough'? For gigging musicians playing a wide variety of venues, owning multiple amps is essential both in terms of having a backup or two, and tailoring the optimum decibel level to the size of the stage. Bands limited to fly gigs and rented backlines are the exception, but ask Sonny Landreth if the greenback-loaded Marshall 4x12 cabs he rents or reissue Twins all sound the same... No, they sure don't, but an increasing number of mid-level working bands have forsaken vans and buses for a plane ticket, while entrusting their tone to the luck of the draw from a rental company. We do know this... the vast majority of custom amps being designed and sold today fall into the 20-25 watt range, indicating that stage volume has come down in favor of portability, fidelity

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*and easy listening, and the rest of these amps are going into homes, and that's where they are likely to stay.*

*So why wouldn't Steve Carr introduce the*

*1x12 and 1x10 dual 6V6 Sportsman? He had his fling with the 80 watt El Moto 10 years ago (and what an amp that was). We asked Steve to elaborate on his intention and motivation in developing the Sportsman, and as usual, he did not disappoint. Our review follows Steve's comments.*

**TQR:** When we first spoke for your cover story 10 years ago, you described how a blackface Deluxe Reverb inspired what became Carr Amps. Reflecting on the past 10 years Steve, how has the custom 'boutique' amp market evolved, changed and grown? Has your market and demographic seemingly settled on moderately powered amps, and if so, how many different ways are there to approach a 25 watt design?

Things have changed quite a bit from 1998 till now. Back then boutique amps and guitars were still a fringe phenomenon. The original Matchless Company had helped re-establish American hand-made amps in the market, but what we were doing was not fully accepted by the majority of guitar players yet. It was also fairly difficult to get parts back then, too. For us there was huge growth from 2003 to 2007. Today it feels like boutique guitars and amps are fully mainstream, but there are also so many companies building amps, and that can be confusing for guitarists. People want great tone at a manageable stage volume. Many of the shows I play are un-miked and I have found our 8 watt Mercury the perfect tool for small clubs. On the occasions when you play a bigger stage, one can simply mike the amp, and 25 watts is plenty loud for almost all real-world applications. Perhaps it has just been a matter of time for people to realize this. Sometimes I feel I am out of ideas – but the next day I wake up and have 10 new concepts to explore, and after testing those I might find one unique circuit. Prototyping is what I call fun! How many ways can you approach a 25 watt amp? There have been 60+ years of guitar amp manufacturing so far – ask me again in another 60!

**TQR:** Both amps display the rich fidelity that we have considered your sonic trademark, and the way in which the Midrange tone control gradually ramps up gain is interesting and very useful for adding a subtle overdriven sound without losing perceived

bandwidth. Are we merely hearing the result of the mids coming up, or is something else at work here?



Our wide bandwidth and fast transient snap have a lot to do with keeping the signal path short and uncluttered, Solen polypropylene filter caps, and wide bandwidth output transformers. The Solen capacitors add a great deal of dimension and 'feel' to the amp, and they are warm sounding

with fantastic transient speed – how fast the amp tracks your pick and fingers – and exceptionally reliable. All of our transformers are custom made for us by a Chicago company that has been doing this since 1949! I am using a new mixed bias method for the output tubes which is very effective in bridging the sound of the '50s and '60s American amps. It has the dynamics of fixed bias with the bounce and midrange complexity of cathode bias, and as a side benefit you do not need to rebias the power tubes when you change them. The Mid control owes a lot to the classic mid '60s American set up but with tweaked values. I spent a fair amount of time balancing its clear fidelity with enough range to get grind and a pushed sound. The Mids are coming up, but due to the circuit value choices it feels like there is more there than just a mid bump.

**TQR:** Can you describe the function and design of the Headroom control?

This is purposefully mysterious. Functionally, it allows you to turn up the volume and turn down the headroom to get a more thick and juicy sound from the pre amp. One thing that is different from other amps that seek to achieve similar things is the pre amp is fairly low gain – so it does not distort much even on full. It just gets thicker and more responsive with juicier harmonics. I like playing the amp both ways – with Headroom at full for the clearest, most dynamic sound, and with it at about 10 o'clock and the Volume high for a greasier tone.

**TQR:** Are you still building your own cabinets?

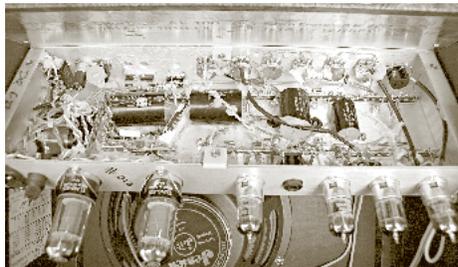
Yes, and our cabinet shop may well be the best guitar amp cabinet shop in the world. We offer consistency, beauty, and rock solid stability. It costs more to do it in-house, but I cannot imagine doing it any other way. The men I have working here are all craftsmen and I am indebted to their attention to detail and dedication.

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**TQR:** Where do you see the custom amp business headed in the future? Has it peaked in terms of the variety of designs and number of builders in your opinion? What is your vision for Carr in the years ahead?

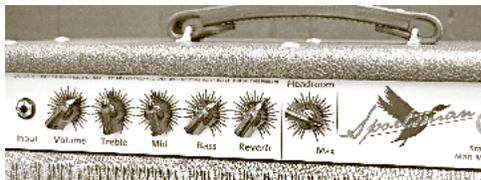
Another big question. I believe we will see continued interest in quality, US made amplifiers. My future plan is to remember – remember why I wanted to do this and keep to that dream. Making the best and most interesting amplifiers I can. This is not a static thing... As I change and learn, my taste evolves. The intent may be the same, but the execution and electronic expression, like music, moves forward.

## Review



The Sportsman impressed us as being a ‘typical’ Carr amp. What does that mean? Meticulously

overbuilt inside, lush and rich with outstanding tone controls and EQ that actually do something useful to justify the extra knobs. Play a Carr amp – any of them – and you’re likely to be impressed by the warmth and depth we heard in the first Rambler we ever played through at Corner Music in Nashville, and for us that ‘round sound’ has become a trademark of Carr amps ever since.



The dual 6V6, diode rectified Sportsman is solidly compact in

the style of a Princeton Reverb with a simple array of controls – Volume, Treble, Midrange, Bass, Reverb, and *Headroom*, with standby and on-off-on switches. The Treble and Bass controls capably deliver what you’d expect, but the Mid gradually ramps up gain, even at low volume levels. Nice. The headroom control is described as being the “interface between the preamp and power amp.” Cleanest sounds are produced with the Headroom control set high and Volume low. Output distortion rises as Volume in increased with Headroom maxed, the reverse produces more preamp distortion. Steve had sent us the 1x10 and 1x12 versions, and both amps produced excellent clarity and clean tones at moderate volume levels, and exceptional overdriven tones that were focused, full and musical. The Jensen alnico Jet 10 is very well balanced and *smooth* when pushed. The Sportsman 1x12 is loaded with an Eminence Red, White and Blues – a big, powerful and



efficient 120W speaker that we are very familiar with from previous reviews. It predictably sounds big, fat and clean in the Sportsman with a slightly more ambient, less direct tone

than the 1x10. Imagine the growl of a tweed Deluxe married to the fidelity of a blackface amp. You should also know that the reverb in the Sportsman is exceptional for a modern small combo, again, in the style of a Princeton Reverb.

If we were to speculate on the *intention* of the Sportsman, it is to fill a niche in the realm of moderately-powered combos that offer exceptional clean tones with equally pleasing reverb, and variable levels of ultra smooth, harmonically complex and musical overdriven tones in a very portable box. What more could you want? The only things missing in the Sportsman perhaps are a Zippo lighter and a Pendleton flannel cover. *Quest forth...TO*

[www.carramps.com](http://www.carramps.com), 919-545-0747

## Visual Sound GarageTone Pedals

We first met Visual Sound founder Bob Weil 10 years ago in Atlanta. Over lunch in a funky Thai restaurant on the Cheshire Bridge strip, Bob described how his first effort to crack the pedal market in the ‘90s with the Visual Volume pedal had nearly fizzled, but the determination in his eyes and voice betrayed the confidence of a man who had learned much from near failure and had a plan. Buoyed by the eventual success of the Jekyll & Hyde dual distortion, Route 66 overdrive and compression, H2O echo and chorus, and the



unique concept of offering two discrete effects in one box, Visual Sound thrived, but only after Weil had managed to locate a manufacturing partner in Taiwan that could consistently produce high-quality work at a reasonable cost. Today, we’re betting

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