

LITTLE SMOKER

Carr Amplifiers Raleigh 1x10 combo

BY ERIC KIRKLAND

NO GUITARIST should be without a great-sounding compact combo. It's one of those indispensable tools whose size and reasonably low output makes it ideal for practice, songwriting and intimate gatherings. Although they may not be loud, their often-astonishing tones are relatively easy to record. Legends like Hendrix, Beck, Clapton and Keith Richards all used diminutive blast boxes to create some of their greatest hits. Of course, the vintage amps those artists favored had all-tube circuitry and the same build quality of their higher-wattage kin, whereas the solid-state and digital combos that pervade our current market of minis don't quite capture the same vibe.

Carr Amplifiers's new boutique-quality Raleigh is a reminder of the tube-derived magic that can be built into a small package. This three-watt, two-mode marvel is intentionally short on frills, but there's nothing small about the Carr's vintage-inspired tube sounds and signature bouncy response.

FEATURES

STONE JUNKIES CHERISH low-wattage midget amps because the lack of extraneous noise from excess circuitry, absence of feedback, and low sound-pressure levels make it possible to enjoy the power section's full range (something that might also improve your marriage and neighborly relations). Even at near maximum settings, the Raleigh's tone is especially quiet and streamlined, thanks to the custom transformer and audiophile-grade Solen power capacitors. Three knobs and a toggle to switch between Clean and Overdrive modes are all that's necessary to explore the Raleigh's wealth of sounds. In the Clean setting, only the volume and tone knob are active. This cleverly designed tone circuit essentially focuses on a wide section of midrange, so that the amp always has clear top notes and ample lows. With the Raleigh switched into Overdrive, the master knob becomes active and the volume knob then serves as a pre-amp gain control.

The Raleigh's three watts and two-sided preamp are driven by a Class A-powered EL84 output tube and a pair of 12AX7 preamp tubes. In layman's terms, the Class A-style power means that the EL84 runs at full voltage all the time, allowing players to experience the tube's richest tones at every volume level. The lack of nonessential circuitry and short signal paths also contribute to pleasingly unsullied tube response.

Carr chose to augment these tones with a 10-inch Eminence Lil' Buddy Hemp Cone speaker. Hemp is known for exceptional warmth, and the Raleigh really reaps the rewards of its natural complexity and bass detail.

Carr's workmanship, cabinet quality, speaker choice and aesthetic detail are second to none in the mini market. You can tap the side of this cabinet and hear a purposely tuned resonance. Every switch, jack, pot, screw and electrical component is of the absolute highest quality available. The long power cord is borrowed from the high-end audio industry and features a hospital-grade plug. Even the chrome-hinged handle is elegant beyond compare and more likely to be seen on a fine piece of luggage.

The Raleigh's grille is wrapped in expensive woven cloth, and the textured black tolex is probably the most durable amp covering obtainable. If a player wants his Raleigh to have a personal touch, figured maple front panels and various tolex colors are also offered at an upcharge.



CARR RALEIGH 1x10

LIST PRICES: Black, \$1,250.00; two-tone or colored tolex, add \$100.00; figured maple front panels, add \$250.00

MANUFACTURER: Carr Amplifiers, carramps.com

POWER OUTPUT: Three watts

CHANNELS: One, two modes

FEATURES: Clean and Overdrive modes, Eminence Lil' Buddy Hemp Cone 10-inch speaker, aluminum chassis, Solen power capacitors, high-end audio power cord, high-quality aesthetic components

CONTROLS: Volume, tone, master, Clean/Overdrive switch

COVERING: Black textured vinyl, heavy woven grille cloth

TUBE COMPLEMENT: One EL84, two 12AX7

The Clean/Overdrive switch changes the preamp's character from Sixties blackface-style clean to a rich, modern tweed overdrive.



PERFORMANCE

THERE'S A WHOLE lot of tone crammed into this little box. What most separates the Raleigh from its vintage counterparts is its ability to stay clean. Depending on the strength of pickups I used, the Carr remained unsullied and dynamic, almost to the amp's full volume. It wasn't until I got past three o'clock on the dial that I started to hear any fur and crunch, although I must say those gnarly pseudo-clean sounds were some of my favorites. The cleans are very much in the Sixties blackface category, with bubbly lows, a somewhat scooped midrange and a soft presence. Eminence's Lil' Buddy Hemp Cone speaker gets a lot of credit for enhancing the bass depth and feel.

Carr's renowned multidimensional distortion flavors are rampant in the Overdrive setting. This is Carr's own brand of southern cooking, and it's not a creamy or liquid tone—we're talking greasy, swarthy, high-cholesterol gain, dripping with juicy overtones. While the Raleigh is probably not for metal or shred heads, certainly slide, classic rock and Delta-blues deacons will love this supercharged tweed-style overdrive.

THE BOTTOM LINE

CARR'S DEVOTION to exceptional hand-built quality is evident in every aspect of the all-tube, all-American Raleigh. Its three watts produce surprisingly loud Sixties-style clean tones as well as southern-fried overdrive that sizzles with fat and sustain, making the Raleigh one very versatile little amp.

ON DISC

Optional two-tone tolex or maple front panels give the Raleigh a collectible boutique look.

PRO	CON
STAYS CLEAN AND RESPONSIVE AT HIGH VOLUMES; FANTASTIC BUILD QUALITY; FAT-AND-GREASY OVERDRIVE	NO FOOTSWITCH OR EFFECT LOOP