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Guitar
Award
MARK OF EXCELLENCE

VHT DELIVERANCE 60

FEATURES

Single-channel 60-watt head with two KT88 tubes

Gain I (voicing)

Gain II (overdrive) with more/less switch

Depth (variable damping) control

Ground lift switch

PRICE

\$1,895 head
\$1,295 D412 cab

WEBSITE

vhtamp.com

HIWATT HI-GAIN 50 SER

FEATURES

Two-channel 50-watt head with two EL34 tubes

Normal/Bright switch (channel 1)

Hi-Gain switch (channel 2)

Accutronics reverb

Effects loop

Mute function and XLR speaker emulation output

PRICE

\$2,599 head
\$1,099 4x12 cab

WEBSITE

hiwatt.com

By Chris Gill

WHILE MOST PLAYERS consider a 100-watt stack the ultimate rig, many guitarists prefer the sound of amps with lower output power. Unless you need a ton of clean headroom, a 50-watt head is often actually better for playing club gigs and recording applications because you can push the power tubes into their overdrive-crunch sweet spot at lower volume levels that don't obliterate everything else in its path.

We looked at a pair of half stacks from Hiwatt and VHT that unleash the fury of their higher output brothers thanks to aggressive high-gain circuits. The Hiwatt Hi-Gain 50 SER is a 50-watt head that starts off with the same classic foundation as the legendary Hiwatt Custom 50 amp but adds a high-gain overdrive channel and several other new features. The VHT Deliverance 60 is a surprisingly loud and powerful single-channel 60-watt head featuring a highly versatile preamp section that lets you switch between three or four gain stages. Both amps provide a wide range classic and modern tones ideal for playing just about any style of music.

HIWATT HI-GAIN 50 SER

Original Hiwatt amps from the '70s are best known for their chiming clean tones and punchy power tube overdrive, but even the newer versions made over the last few years and during the '90s never provided the high-gain distortion tones essential for playing modern hard rock styles. Hiwatt's new Hi-Gain series amps solve that dilemma by providing a second channel featuring a high-gain overdrive circuit. This two-channel amp is like two amps in one—a classic Hiwatt Custom 50 and a modern hot-rodded, fire-breathing beast.

FEATURES

We looked at Hiwatt's top-of-the-line SER version of the Hi-Gain 50 head, which includes additional features such as Accutronics reverb, a mono effects loop, an amplifier mute function, and an XLR output with speaker emulation. All of these extra features add only \$150 to the base Hi-Gain 50's list price. You can control reverb, FX loop, and mute on/off and channel switching functions with optional footswitches.

The Hi-Gain 50 head retains the classic looks and lines of an original Hiwatt head with one exception—the pair of white knobs at the left of the front panel. The leftmost knob functions as Channel 1's preamp volume control and as a push/pull normal/bright switch. The white knob to its right

CHRIS GILL

is a gain control for Channel 2, which you can pull out to engage even more gain. Channel 2 also features a separate level control, which is puzzlingly placed between the presence and reverb control. Both channels share the bass, middle, treble, presence, reverb, and master volume controls.

The rear panel provides four speaker outputs (a pair of 8-ohm jacks and single 16- and 4-ohm jacks), a pair of footswitch jacks for controlling channel 1 and 2/mute and reverb/FX loop functions, effects send and return jacks, and a balanced XLR speaker emulation output (for use with the mute function). There's also a switch for selecting 240 or 120-volt power (ideal for guitarists who gig overseas) and a switch for the output mute function, with settings that are confusingly labeled as "mute" and "on" (in the "on" setting the amp functions normally). The

output mute bypasses the speaker outputs and instead sends the signal from the preamp to the XLR speaker emulation jack, allowing you to plug the amp directly to a mixing board for direct recording applications.

SOUND

As the proud owner of an original Hiwatt DR504 Custom 50 that I purchased brand new in 1978, I can testify that channel 1 of the Hi-Gain 50 nails its tone, attack, and vibe almost perfectly. The only significant difference I noticed is that the midrange control is more assertive, with a more-pronounced, vocal-like presence, especially when the bright setting is engaged.

When you switch over to channel 2, the amp becomes significantly more aggressive while retaining much of the signature zing and fast,

responsive transient attack that characterizes the Hiwatt sound. Even with the hi-gain setting kicked in, pick attack and the definition of each string remains clearly defined instead of turning into the indecipherable mush that many high-gain amps produce at extreme settings.

Getting the sound you desire from the Hi-Gain 50 SER is a very straightforward affair, although some players may wish that each channel had its own separate EQ section. However, we found that most EQ settings sounded good on both channels unless we were going for extreme tones on the hi-gain channel such as scooped mids or drastically over-emphasized bass. The Hi-Gain 4x12 cabinet loaded with 75-watt Fane speakers provided crystal-clear sound even with the amp's gain pushed to its extreme.

IS IT FOR YOU?

Hiwatt players are a select breed of guitarists that include David Gilmour, Alex Lifeson, and Pete Townshend amongst its ranks. The new Hi-Gain series should attract a new generation of players who love the classic Hiwatt sound but are also looking for more modern and aggressive tones. Although we're not big fans of reverb on high-powered heads, we think it's worth spending the extra bill or so for the effects loop and mute function.

MASSIMO GAMMACURTA

