



# GEAR

## REVIEW



## BIG-BLOCK TONE

### The Carr Impala

**W**hile the new Carr Impala amplifier gets its name and some of its aesthetic inspiration from the classic Chevy muscle car, its tone inspiration comes from one of the classic '60 workhorse amps – the Fender Bassman.

The Impala's overall look and vibe are certainly mid-century retro, with heavily radiused corners and a curved, asymmetrical speaker grille giving it an automotive vibe. A dovetailed solid pine cabinet with a floating plywood baffle is covered by a masterfully executed black tolex application with white piping and a white control panel with black chickenhead knobs (a variety of color options, as well as tweed, are available). Also noteworthy are Carr's proprietary handmade leather handle by Rocky River Leather Company, attached with rivets, a long hospital-grade power cord, and 6-gauge speaker lead.

Under the hood, the Impala sports a pair of Electron 6L6WGC power tubes

producing a stout 44 watts; one 12AX7, one 5751, and two 12AX7 preamp tubes; custom-wound transformers; a custom Carr Elsinore ceramic-magnet 12" speaker, and low-tolerance, high-end components – all point-to-point-wired in a heavy 12-gauge aluminum chassis. The straightforward circuit features Volume, Bass, Mid, and Treble controls, but adds a tube-driven reverb circuit (with a MOD spring reverb tank) and a Master volume control, all in a single 12" combo.

The Carr Impala was tested with a Fender '60 Relic Custom Shop Strat loaded with a trio of OEM single-coils, as well as with a Gibson Les Paul Standard Plus with a pair of BurstBuckers. With the Strat plugged in and the Master volume knob all the way up and out of the circuit, the results were classic Bassman – round, punchy lows, even and

slightly pulled-back midrange, and clean, shimmering highs with lots of headroom. The amp produced a plentiful amount of natural overtones, and the tone stack is well voiced and natural sounding, allowing the player to dial up a variety of sounds.

The Impala's Mid control is very interactive with the Bass and Treble controls, allowing for more versatility over the traditional Fender-style Mid control, resulting in a U.K.-style mid with more available midrange bite. Carr includes a small "68" mark for the Mid knob so the midrange frequency can be set to mimic a '68 Bassman. This setting worked the best for clean sounds, while higher settings worked well for overdrives with more bark to the mids. The Volume control didn't need much turning to add a bit of overdrive to the sound with nice touch-sensitivity. With a 44-watt powerplant, the amp gets loud quickly, and the Master control worked well to tame the overall output and to tighten up its open sound for a more focused low end and overdrive.

The Les Paul coaxed the most overdrive out of the Impala's preamp, and the addition of an Ibanez TS9 overdrive achieved a crunchy distortion with lots of overtones. The amp's pedal-friendly front end also reacted well to an MXR Dyna Comp compressor for a nice punchy chicken pickin' sound with the Strat and a fat, round blues sound with the Les Paul. The lack of channel switching or multiple (clean/dirty) channels on the Impala wasn't a real issue because between the Volume control on the guitar, the overdrive pedal, and the amp's nice touch-sensitive front end, moving from dirty to clean was as simple as rolling down the guitar's Volume control, disengaging the OD pedal, or simply lightening one's pick attack. To top it off, the

Impala's tube-driven reverb offers a crisp-yet-warm old-school sound that can be made subtle with just a touch of ambience, or a deep soaking for a killer surf sound.

Like the Bassman that inspired it, the Carr Impala is an excellent foundation for a variety of musical styles. Its big powerplant, straightforward layout, pedal-friendly front end, and killer tank should make it popular with many players. – *Phil Feser*

**CARR IMPALA**  
Price: \$2,490 (retail, in black); \$2,640 (two-tone)  
Info: carramps.com