



Carr Mercury V

Billed as the British cousin of Carr's Skylark, the Mercury V is packed with features and is very different from previous models. **HUW PRICE** gets ready for lift off...

Long-standing readers may be aware that this is the third time a Carr Mercury has been reviewed in *G&B*, but on each occasion the amp itself has been somewhat different. The differences between the first two versions were relatively minor, with an EL34 power valve replacing the KT66 and a speaker swap. But besides the name and the similarity of the cabinet, the Mercury V is entirely different.

The biggest change is the power increase to 16 watts courtesy of a pair of 6V6s. Previously the best you could hope for was eight watts, but this isn't just for loud - the Mercury V still has built in attenuation. Fully bypassable and continually variable, it initially drops max power to four watts, then gradually rolls it down to 0.002-watts.

Equally significant is a completely reworked preamp section that is voiced for a raft of British tones. The preamp operates in two modes with the first inspired by the practice of linking the channels on vintage-style Marshalls. The first double triode in the preamp operates in parallel mode with each plate output routed through different voicing components before reaching individual high and low volume controls. These recombine the signals before hitting the following preamp valve so you can mix the different signals to taste.

Flicking the parallel/series toggle switch reconfigures the input valve so the first triode feeds into the second triode. Both volume controls remain

operative but high volume comes after the first gain stage and low volume is located after the second gain stage. So it's more of a Dumble or hot-rodged Marshall arrangement. The original Mercury's three-way tone stack defeat switch has been replaced with a three-way boost switch and a wide-range middle control augments the old treble and bass tone stack.

More makers claim to build amps using the point-to-point wiring method than actually do so, but this is the real deal

The built-in spring reverb is retained and designer Steve Carr suggests that it's good enough to use as an outboard effect. With traditional valve amps this can be problematic, however the Mercury V has a line output for direct

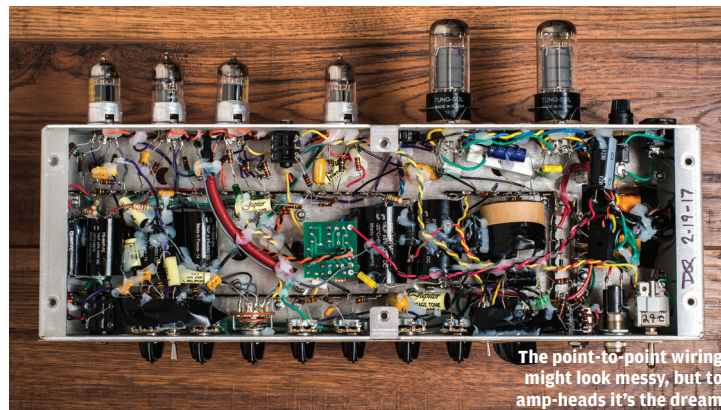
to desk or soundcard duties. So Carr's suggestion is perfectly feasible and you can even silence the amp by turning the attenuator all the way down.

The G12M Creamback is a fitting choice given the British theme and it has a 75Hz resonance. There is just one speaker out, but you can run a 16-ohm extension cab in conjunction with the onboard speaker, using a 'Y' cable.

The Mercury V is wired in Carr's usual point-to-point style. More claim to build amps using this method than actually do so, but this is the real deal. To the casual observer the components may look like a rat's nest, but it's

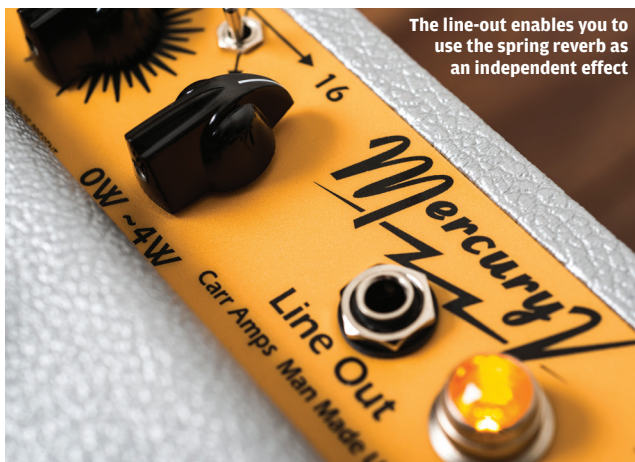
KEY FEATURES

- **PRICE** £2,649
- **DESCRIPTION** One-channel fixed-bias valve combo. Built in the USA
- **POWER RATING** 16W/4W-0.002W (attenuated)
- **VALVES** 4x 12AX7, 2x 6V6
- **CONTROL PANEL** Input socket, high volume, low volume, parallel/series switch, 3-way boost, reverb, treble, mid, bass, attenuator bypass switch, attenuator control, line output, play/off/standby switch
- **REAR PANEL** N/A
- **SPEAKER** Celestion G12M Creamback (75Hz)
- **DIMENSIONS** 535(w) x 440(h) x 254mm (d)
- **WEIGHT** 18kg/40lb
- **OPTIONS** 2 Tone Luna (as reviewed), Black (£2,499), also available in head-only format
- **CONTACT** Coda Music 01438 350815
www.carramps.com
www.coda-music.com



The point-to-point wiring might look messy, but to amp-heads it's the dream

CARR MERCURY V £2,649
AMPLIFIERS



The line-out enables you to use the spring reverb as an independent effect




The high and low volumes can be used in series or parallel for tone-shaping variety



accent and things really start to sing. At maximum boost you get more upper mid push and brightness along with some bass roll-off.

The boosts have exactly the same effect in series mode but the starting point for gain and midrange push is significantly higher. This isn't where you'll find its cleanest or clearest tones but if you want Dumble-tinged West Coast blues, fusion or even metal, you can dial whatever is required.

Ultimately the gain range is enormous and you can get as much sustain as you could ever need, but both preamp modes clean up from the guitar superbly. Things get cleaner rather than significantly quieter and the amp never sounds or feels lifeless – even when you're turned way down. You can also back your guitar tone fully off and the Mercury V still has sufficient harmonic overtones to retain definition.

Whether the changes constitute an improvement isn't exactly clear-cut. The original Mercury is one of our most fondly remembered amps and some of its straight-through charm has been lost. Fortunately the Mercury V also delivers incredible sustain and tactile overdrive at flatmate/family friendly levels but it's easily loud enough for gigging too. We would also suggest it has a more identifiable sonic character and is far more versatile. 

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Although only available in head format the **Victory Sheriff 22 (£799)** also provides era spanning Marshall tones and comes with onboard attenuation and channel switching. Although it doesn't do the hot-rod thing, the **Gartone Regal 18 combo (£1,950)** features independent 18W and JTM preamps and a Celestion Gold

actually a thing of beauty. Signal paths are reduced to a minimum, wherever possible components are used instead of hookup wire and silicon sealer holds everything firmly in place.

In Use

Despite the apparent complexity of the controls, the Mercury V is simple to operate once you grasp how the circuit functions. As a starting point, try setting all the tone controls to around noon, put the boost in the middle position and switch to parallel mode. With both volume controls at minimum, turn up each one individually to assess the voicings. 'Low' has considerable upper midrange and treble attenuation while 'high' has low midrange and bass roll-off.

For initial tone shaping and gain settings, balance the volume controls to zone in on your sound then tweak the tone controls to get things exactly right. Switch to series mode, start with high set at maximum with low barely on then reverse the settings. You'll notice you get more overdrive and brightness with the first configuration and a less driven but fuller tone with the second.

Again it's about balancing the two, but this time it's more about overdrive shaping than frequency balance and the

tone controls play a greater role. They are extremely powerful and you can actually silence the amp by setting all three to zero.

The Mercury V is a perfect example of the supremacy of speaker selection, in conjunction with preamp and tone stack design, over power valves in determining the sonic signature of an amp. When overdriven, this amp is undeniably British sounding due to its upper-mid crunch, lower-mid punch and aggression. It's the same story clean as it generates an ethereal shimmer over scooped mids and huge lows.

There's a decent amount of clean headroom in parallel mode with boost set to minimum. It's the Mercury at its most blackface-like as the tone stack's mid-scoop is apparent. The reverb adds to the illusion and then some, going beyond splashy surf and into full-on Dick Dale territory. The differences are the Mercury V's complete lack of transient spikiness and its more throaty and compressed midrange.

Taking the boost up a notch increases gain and dramatically fills out the midrange with extra compression and low-mid growl. You can hear a sweet grittiness in the overdrive that could never be mistaken for an American

Guitar VERDICT

- + Hugely versatile
- + Enormous gain and volume range
- + Powerful tone controls
- + Enjoyable line-out tone
- + Superb attenuator

- No footswitchable features
- No effects loop

A remarkably versatile and innovative amplifier with the extraordinary tone and build quality we have come to expect from Carr

9/10