

Carr Rambler Amplifier

Years ago I had a club gig booked and, a few days before the show, the club owner (an Internet millionaire, don't-cha-know) phoned to tell me I could save myself some trouble and leave my own amp at home. He said had me covered with a house amp. For better or for worse, I didn't ask what kind of amp it was—I jumped at the chance to *not* lug my 2x12 combo to the show.

And wouldn't you know it? Millionaires have nice stuff. Onstage that night was a blackface Fender Deluxe Reverb—vintage for sure, and worn in all the right spots.

It's embarrassing to write that at that point I was years into my musical "career" and had still never played through a Deluxe—blackface, vintage or otherwise. And, being a guy who was used to the clarity of a Twin Reverb, the Deluxe left me a bit bewildered. I was accustomed to having a lot of headroom—I like my basic sound clean and clear—and it didn't take much for that Deluxe to break up into overdrive.

As sweet as that crunchy Deluxe sound might have been, the experience made me wary of 1x12 combo tube amps for quite a while. When I recently got to know the Rambler from Carr Amplifiers, I formed a new opinion altogether. Sure, the Rambler offers less headroom than a Twin, but compared to a Deluxe, it sounds like the foyer at the Taj Mahal (which I've never visited but I imagine the ceilings reach the heavens).

The Rambler is sweet (as it should be, listing for \$2,290), and it's sweet for at least two reasons: its pentode/triode switch

and its smooth-as-glass tremolo. Everything else—its deep, three-dimensional clean tone; its classy aesthetics; its near-dead quietness—is icing on a very tasty cake.

The pentode/triode switch effectively makes the Rambler two amps in one. I'd need to go back to school (probably for a long time) to understand the difference between pentodes and triodes, but this much

on a high-handle-barred Harley cruising the open road. It'll really do you good for all the classic sounds of jazz, blues, blues-rock, rockabilly and country and Western. Feed it with the right stompboxes and you should be satisfied with how it can deliver sounds for hard rock, fusion and even heavy-metal. (If you are a diehard metalhead—and by that I mean the kind of metalhead who actually worships Satan—you'll want something else. By the way, why are you reading *JazzTimes*?)

The Rambler features a standard set of controls for a single-channel amp. Chicken-head knobs are supplied on the top of the cabinet for volume, equalization (treble, middle, bass), reverb and tremolo depth and speed. I did find it curious that the included footswitch controls only the tremolo, turning it on and off. It'd be nice to have the same option for the reverb. And I like to have an effects loop, which the Rambler doesn't offer.

There are other speaker configurations available for the Rambler, including an option for a head unit. The 1x12 includes an Eminence Wizard speaker, which seems to be a great cone for classic tone.

And while the unit sent for review came wrapped in the deep red, "wine" tolex covering, the standard is black and any other covering costs another hundred bucks (the stylin' "cowboy" option seen on Carr's Web site looks well worth the money).

For a variety of reasons, boutique amps like the Rambler cost more money than similar amps from larger manufacturers. In this case, I'd say what you're paying for—beyond the *great* tone—is top-notch craftsmanship, hand-wired electronics and thoughtful, well-researched design that adds up to a solid piece of dependable equipment. If a Rambler happened to be the next house amp I met onstage at a gig one night, I'd know my tone was in good hands. **RUSSELL CARLSON**



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I know: Put the Rambler in triode mode and it operates at 14 watts. Flick over to pentode mode and the output doubles to 28. Naturally, it's in the higher-wattage setting that you find the glorious headroom. Within that space I found a clean sound that just felt alive as it came out of the amp. The Rambler really responds to expressive playing.

Any amp junkie will have already guessed that the Rambler employs the same type of power tubes as a Fender Deluxe: a pair of 6L6s, with the requisite 12AX7-type valves filling out the chassis. And, as such, the Rambler sounds as American as the tailpipe