



Description: 50W 1×12" combo; 3 x ECC83 and 2 x EL34 valves. Made in USA

Price: £1495

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If you ask a dozen designers to come up with the perfect amp for throaty British overdrive, starting with nothing but a blank sheet of paper and a purple crayon, at least half of them will probably begin by drawing a pair (or quartet) of EL34 output valves.



These are the signature tubes of hard-rocking Marshall/Orange grind, and they love to distort like Count von Count from Sesame Street loves to count. So, here's a solid-looking 50W combo packing two EL34s and a Celestion G12T-75 – Yngwie Malmsteen's favourite speaker – meaning it can only be time to don some black leather and get down to some heavy riffing.

Or is it? No, you grubby hooligan, it most certainly isn't. This amp has the word 'Jazz' in its name, and while that's also true of not-very-jazzy gear like the Fender Jazz Bass and Jazzmaster, in this case they mean it. Rivera has designed this 1×12" combo with archtop-slingers in mind, and those big valves have been set up for maximum clean headroom – though, being EL34s, they'll surely roughen up a bit if you push them.

Spacious cabinet houses a capable Celestion normally used on high-gain amps



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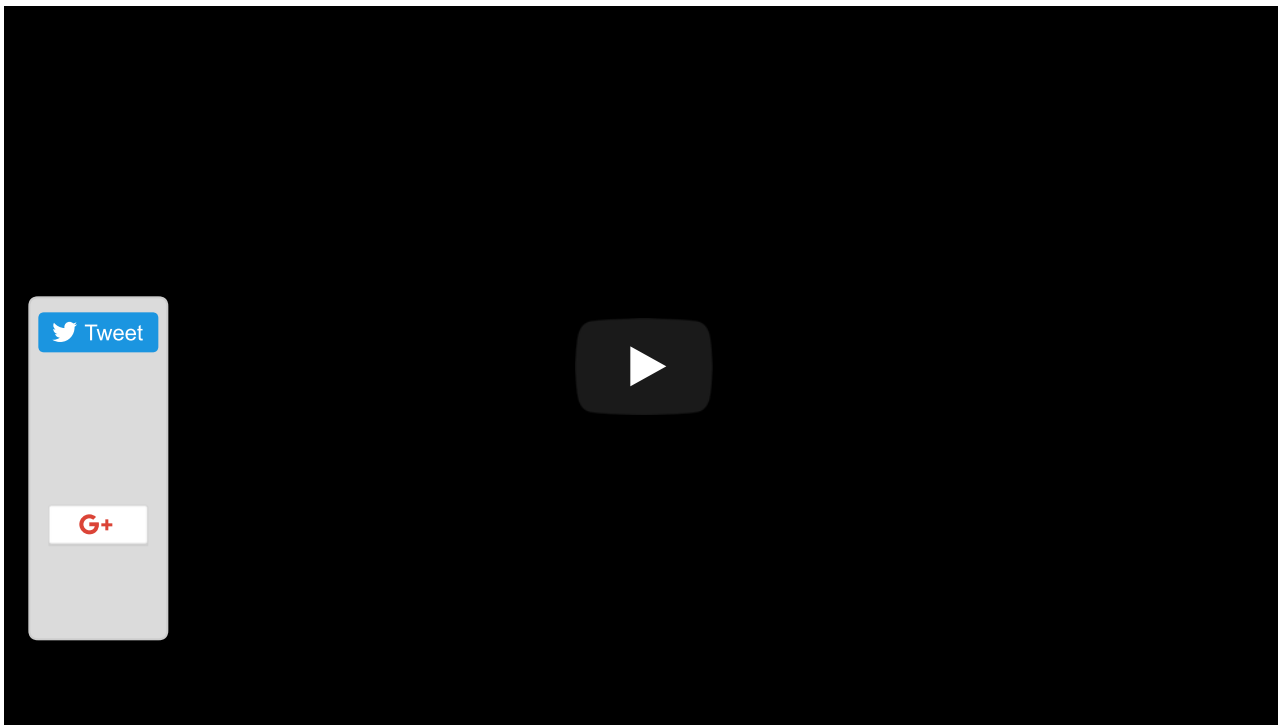
It's a compact amp but deceptively heavy, partly because of the large transformers (the mains trannie is a whopper) and partly because it measures over a foot from front to back. There's a clear three inches of empty cabinet behind the chassis and speaker, presumably just to add resonance. A short reverb tray sits at the bottom, and the chassis is suspended from the top of the cab by eight medium-sized bolts. The leather strap looks tough but, unless you spent the summer at bus-lifting camp, you might prefer to hump this thing around with both hands.

Rivera has designed this combo with archtop-slingers in mind, and those big valves are set up for maximum headroom

Let's not forget to appreciate the look. Whether or not the strip down the middle of the speaker grille has any sound-diffusing properties, it certainly adds to the 'jazz age' vibe, and the discreet gold piping makes its own contribution to the sense of quiet class.

Round the back we can see that all the glassware is chassis-mounted and hangs down into the void, with the three preamp valves protected by metal covers and the two big ones gripped at the base by brackets. And on the inside? Rivera does not go in for hand-wiring but it's neat, and the output valves are wired up to a separate PCB from the preamp section.

The front panel has a couple of features that should pique stool-dwelling beboppers and crowd-surfing funk-metallers alike. On the left, between preamp Volume and Reverb level, we find a three-way tonestack with two pull-out options: a Bright boost on the Treble knob and a voice-modifying Notch on the Middle. On the right, there's Master volume and a couple of dials for messing with the negative feedback loop: Focus (Rivera describes this as a speaker-damping function) and Presence. You can pull out the Focus control for a Fat boost.



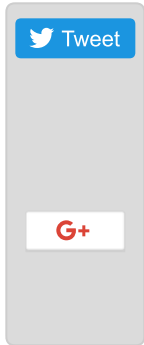
There's one more thing to mention on the back panel: an FX loop, with send and return level controls. True, Wes Montgomery got by alright without an FX loop, but fusion fans might find a use for this – and maybe it suggests us rock'n'roll guttersnipes haven't been completely forgotten.

Sound

Right, let's turn down the lights, spark up a herbal cigarette for that Jazz Club vibe – nice! – and plug in a suitably refined archtop. My first instinct when trying out an amp with master volume is to jam it round to maximum and gradually bring up the preamp level, but the Jazz Suprema is different. In fact, the first issue with that approach is that the background noise gets quite oppressive quite quickly when you turn the Master dial beyond 7-ish.

The second issue is that it really isn't necessary, because pushing the output valves makes little difference to the character of the sound except for making it louder: this amp sounds great with preamp Volume at 6 and Master all the way down at 3.

And they're not joking about the 'clean' thing. Upping the preamp gain will enrich the tone with harmonic distortion, but you won't audibly scuzz the edges – at least with a relatively low-output pickup – unless you hammer it.



This amp is all about warmth and clarity, with a sparkly top end to match its thumpy bottom, allowing a hollowbody's natural woodiness to shine through and responding eagerly to more aggressive pick attack.

The three EQ controls offer more than enough scope for fine-tuning your tone, especially when you include the pull-out options: the first acts a lot like the Bright switch on a blackface Fender Twin, while the second shifts the centre of the mid-frequency attenuation for a dramatic change of mood; it's thinner and more clanky, but will open up all sorts of expressive possibilities with the right guitar.

The reverb is nice and lush, while Presence and Focus offer a much more subtle kind of control over the feel of the amp. The only slight disappointment here is that the Fat switch seems to roll off a sliver of treble rather than adding body, as the name might suggest.

So, time to ditch that herbal cigarette, kick away the stool and see what happens when this amp meets an SG that hasn't had its dinner. First of all, as you might expect, all that headroom translates to a clean rhythm sound that can fill a room effortlessly and takes pedals very well – if you prefer to get your distortion from a box, the Jazz Suprema makes a beautiful blank canvas.

But what you might not expect is just how good it can sound when it's really cooking: bluesy break-up on the neck pickup is one thing, but the smooth and solid overdrive available in the bridge position with everything cranked is pure EL34 joy. It's like everything after the first paragraph of this review never happened.



Verdict

Not a jazz guitarist? Shudder at the very thought of being asked to play a chord with numbers in it? Don't be afraid of this Rivera. It's just a really nice clean amp, and it's hard to imagine how anyone could turn it down for being 'too jazzy' – and while you won't get much overdrive out of it at practice levels, if you turn it up, it'll crunch like a steamroller in a biscuit factory.

FINAL SCORE	
RIVERA JAZZ SUPREMA 112	
Build Quality	19/20
Versatility	17/20
Sound	18/20
Value for money	16/20
Vibe	17/20
TOTAL	87%

Comments

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