

THD Univalve

CLASS A GUITAR AMPLIFIER

THD do things a little differently, but the results invariably justify the unique approach.



FACT FILE

Made USA
Price \$2350
Features ▶ Single End Class A
▶ Inbuilt Hot Plate power Attenuator
▶ Self-biasing
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A few issues back we were blown away by the fantastic tone and ease of use of the THD BiValve amplifier. The BiValve seemed to strip back much of the approach to amplification and focus on delivering blistering class A tone rather than lots of channels and options. Sure the options were there – including a built in speaker attenuator for good measure – but the THD idea of options as we found on the BiValve was refreshingly free of any hint of gimmick. Well, if the BiValve's simple and genuine approach was refreshing, then the UniValve is certainly at least as exciting for all the same reasons.

The UniValve is a single-ended, 30 watt Class A amplifier, which is pretty much code for 'a slab of pure tone'. The amp only features one output tube,

but the beauty of this set up is that you can switch that tube between a whole host of valve options including 6L6, EL34, 6550, 7027, KT90, KT88, KT77 and KT66, for different tones without re-biasing the amp. On top of that, the two preamp tubes can be any combination of 12AX7, 12AT7, 12AU7, 12AY7 or 12AZ7, again offering more tonal variations and slightly different feels from the amp.

Deceptively Simple

So what does all this mean for the player. Well, let's start with the fact that this amp is single-ended. Now, Class A operation essentially means that the amp runs its tubes at full current all the time (unlike most tube amps that alternate between running one set of tubes and the other set, each for one half of the wave). However, it's common for amps that are called Class A to actually alternate current when they are running in overdrive, even if they run full current when clean. A single-ended amp, on the other hand, runs Class A all the time. This delivers the sort of stunning warmth and tone that has ensured the music business is on of the few areas left in the world that couldn't live without tubes. Of course, this also means that a single ended class A amp produces a lot of volume, which can be a bit of problem given that the best tones you're ever going to pull from a valve amp come when you're driving it hard. Thus the UniValve's low output rating. However, the good folk at THD didn't think that was enough, and included their world renowned Hot Plate power attenuator as a standard built in feature on the UniValve. The Hot Plate limits out put while still letting you drive the amp at maximum power, thus allowing you to achieve rich overdriven tones at very low volumes.

As our review of the stand alone Hot Plate discovered last issue, these attenuators are top notch. Feel and tone are perfectly retained, while the six levels of volume control are graduated perfectly.

And it's just as well the attenuator is as transparent as it is, because the those tones it's working in aid of are to die for. On top of all the other thinking that THD has done in putting this amp together, they've also made sure that it's core sound is exceptional. Rich and thick, this amp inspires all those terms like 'honey' and 'treacle'. Featuring two channels – a high gain and a low gain input – the UniValve has the depth and variety to cover most the needs of a discerning, tone conscious player. There was a syrupy feel to the gain, and as you wound it up, the UniValve seemed to

provide warmth and sustain without sacrificing clarity. At the upper end this amp probably doesn't have the overkill saturation that today's metal head

would look for, but it does have all the character

and class which that sort of saturation destroys. The humbuckers of the office Maton Mastersound loved the warmth this amp had to offer in the classic rock department, but the UniValve was equally able to provide some twang from a Tele style guitar.

And what of the fact that you can change the valves to just about anything you want? Well, essentially this means you can tweak the response and character of the amp to suit your playing style. If you're a predominately clean player, a 6550 tube will give you more volume with less breakup; if you're more a high end guitarist, then a 6L6 delivers crisp, focused overdrive; or an EL34 will loan you sound that British feel that so many people love. With the huge range of power tubes available, the subtle differences you can achieve with various valves will really appeal to sensitive (dare we say it, fussy) players. The UniValve makes this a very easy thing to explore, due in no small part to the fact that the amp is self biasing, with circuitry that senses the current needs of the output tube and provides the correct bias voltage regardless of tube type or wear.

The Bottom Line

If it's tone and subtlety that you're interested in, the UniValve is an absolute must see. If you've been playing valve amps for years and are looking for one that is both practical and gorgeous to listen to, then innovations like the self biasing and speaker attenuator, plus a cracker tone will have you excited. ■