





Gartone

Regal 45

Point to point turret board wiring, carbon comp resistors, audio-grade signal capacitors, Mercury Magnetics transformers, KT66 power valves, custom Alnico speakers - and handmade here in the UK. Review by **Huw Price**

The Marshall 'Bluesbreaker' combo is one of the shining icons of British rock, and Martin Garton's quest to build an authentic version began when James Skelly of the Coral complained that his reissue Marshall didn't nail Clapton's mid-1960s tone. Garton examined the amp and concluded that there were so many differences that it would be simpler to build a Bluesbreaker from scratch.

An exhaustive period of research followed where every component was analysed. The core ingredients of that landmark tone were identified as the original RS output transformer with its 6.6Kohm primary impedance, KT66 power valves and Celestion G12 alnico speakers; Garton sought out the closest modern equivalents and settled on Mercury Magnetics transformers and Harma KT66 valves. The Celestion G12 lives on as the Alnico Blue but Garton felt that the 15W power rating was insufficient. Instead he chose the Tayden New Vintage, voiced specially by the manufacturer for this amp.

Besides ditching the tremolo, the Regal 45 circuit is essentially stock JTM45 with minor alterations to the power supply and bias. Some tweaks were required to conform to today's safety standards and a couple of parts



The Gartone follows the tone stack and two-channel format of the original, minus tremolo

This is a thrilling amp that retains an almost hi-fi like clarity and definition even when it's distorting like crazy

values were altered to get vintage voicing with modern components.

Garton contracts out the cabnetwork but he does the covering in-house along with the electronic construction. I had a peek inside and I have never seen anyone do a neater wiring job, but the tolex was lifting slightly on one corner of the faceplate cut out. Still, at least it comes with a 10-year warranty.

Sounds

I spoke with Garton a few days before I received his amp, joking that I'd be putting a fresh strings on my Lester and brushing up on my 'Beano' licks. He paused, then said, 'It will do that, of course... but it can do lot more.'

Once the amp arrived, I understood why. This is a thrilling amplifier that retains an almost hi-fi clarity, even ➔

FACTFILE

Gartone Regal 45

SPECS Two channel 45W valve combo with 2x12" custom voiced Tayden New Vintage alnico speakers, 2 x Harma KT66 power valves, GZ34 rectifier, Mercury Magnetics transformers and choke, turret board construction, birch ply cabinet. Made in the UK
PRICE £1995

CONTROLS Volume 1 & 2, Treble, Mid, Bass, Presence

DIMENSIONS 53cm high, 70.5cm wide, 26.5cm deep
WEIGHT 28kg/62lbs

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Marshall

1962 Bluesbreaker Reissue

Marshall's current reissue has the correct-sized cabinet, turret board wiring and a GZ34 rectifier but it runs with EL34 power valves and it's fitted with ceramic Greenback Celestion G12 speakers. Authentic Marshall tone, no doubt - but not really an authentic Bluesbreaker

RRP **£1,282**

Louis

Electric Bluesbreaker

This reissue from one of the most respected US boutique amp builders features Genelex KT66 valves and a custom output transformer with hand-built limited edition Greenback speakers and/or Celestion Alnico Golds

RRP **£2,995**

when it's distorting like crazy, and it maintains definition and tightness even when the speakers seem like they're about to burst out of the cabinet. It's also whisper-quiet, with barely any trace of hiss or hum.

Regardless of saturation levels the Regal 45 has a degree of chime and sparkle that allows you to explore the full frequency range of any guitar. You may hear tones from LP-type guitars that you hadn't realised they were capable of. Early Marshall-style circuits are synonymous with overdrive and distortion, but the superb quality of this amp's clean tones is equally impressive.

Tonal differences between the Normal and Bright channels are pretty profound. The Bright channel shimmers with an unusual degree of openness and zing; clean tones from humbuckers are not a problem, but plug in a guitar with single coils and you can do funk, twanging country or even jazz quite easily. In contrast, the Normal channel has a thicker and chewier quality that really suits warmer and more rounded clean tones.

The tone controls produce plenty of frequency swing, the Treble and Presence knobs having a particularly strong influence. This provides a wide range of sounds, allowing the Regal 45 to deliver the goods with a variety of guitars and pickups.

Both volume controls operate smoothly. Rather than jumping suddenly into life or reaching a ceiling above which nothing really changes, volume and overdrive increase gradually. Long before the Regal 45 reaches its raw, creamy, growling



The Tayden New Vintage 12" alnico speakers are spec'ed specially for this amplifier

The Regal 45 is more about complexity, dynamics and harmonic overtones than brutal crunch and sheer aggression

zenith, you'll encounter a full spectrum of overdrive tones from the point where single coils initiate break up between settings 3 and 4 on the volume controls.

Plenty of amps deliver fine clean tones and overdrive willingly, but dynamic response is surely the factor that separates decent amps from exceptional ones. The Regal 45 is without doubt one of the most dynamic and expressive amps I have ever had the privilege to play through. Hit the strings hard and you'll get deep, growling powerchords, while single notes effortlessly sustain with near vocal quality. Brush the strings lightly and, even at the same settings, the Regal 45 cleans up to display complex, subtle and surprising sweetness.

The Tayden speakers are integral to the tone. It's reasonable to assume that some of the Regal 45's chime and transparency is attributable to the alnico magnets and a degree of speaker breakup certainly augments the amp overdrive as the volume approaches maximum. The open-back cabinet also contributes to this amp's room-filling 3D quality; at times it may even fool you into thinking there's a built-in reverb.

Verdict

Although the Regal 45 can produce huge amounts of overdrive/distortion, to my ears the sound differs from the EL34-loaded Marshalls I've used. I'd suggest that the Regal 45 is more about complexity, dynamic response and harmonic overtones and less about brutal crunch and sheer aggression. In other words, it's a far more sophisticated, versatile and subtle guitar amp. The valve rectifier also provides a touch-feely quality that all but eliminates any intense, spiky transients, making the Regal 45 feel very easy to play even at high volume. It's a remarkable amplifier in every respect, and it's a product that anybody chasing authentic early Marshall tone should consider. 🎸

The Harma KT66 output valves recreate the GEC Osram KT66 from grid structure to bottle shape and even brown bases



FINAL SCORE

GARTONE REGAL 45	
Build Quality	19/20
Versatility	18/20
Sound	19/20
Value for money	18/20
Looks	18/20
TOTAL	92%