



GARTONE

Regal 1836c

Inspired by a request to build an amp to replace some vintage collectibles, Gartone have produced a unit designed to pay tribute to two British greats. Review by **Hayden Hewitt**

Gartone amps are no stranger to the pages of *Guitar & Bass* so it's fair to say we were looking forward to the Regal 18/36 turning up for testing. This particular amplifier came about because a customer of Gartone wanted to retire his various vintage Vox AC30s and early Marshalls and consolidate all his favourite sounds in one box. In this day and age of digital modelling that sounds pretty much par for the course, but here we're talking about a quest for absolute accuracy in a handwired, boutique amplifier.

On first inspection the Regal 18/36 looks the part. A fairly small head, it's retro but without any slavish copying or kitsch aspects. It evokes rather than apes the amps of the era it's aiming for, and it oozes quality. This clean look translates well to the controls, with simple EQ controls on the front for the two channels; all the switching is taken care of around the back, preventing the amp from looking cluttered. Good idea, as with the raft of features this amp has it would have been all too easy to overwhelm the front panel.

Control-wise it's still relatively simple. There are four inputs (two for each channel, Hi and Low) and Channel 1 (the 'Vox' channel) gets one Volume and one Tone control... and that's your lot.



The Gartone evokes rather than apes the amps it's aiming for, with all the switching at the rear to keep a clean look

Channel 2 is a little more well-endowed with two gain pots, Bass, Mid and Treble along with your master volume, a button to take the master volume out of the equation and the rather wonderfully named Vibe knob. Vibe is actually a negative feedback control: to put it simply, as you turn it clockwise you actually increase gain and top end.

It also gives the amp a more aggressive character, which we approve of.

Around the rear of the amp you'll find a raft of switches which either allow you to set the correct characteristics for the amp you are emulating or - even more tantalisingly - let you pretty much create your own vintage-style amplifier. You can select the output (by

FACTFILE

GARTONE REGAL 1836C

DESCRIPTION Handwired valve amplifier with two independent channels, variable power setting (9, 18 or 36W), switchable solid state/valve rectifier, four EL84 valves and four ECC83s. Built in the UK
PRICE £1795

CONNECTIONS Four inputs (two per channel, Hi/Low). Channel 1 features Volume and Tone controls; Channel 2 features Vol 1 and Vol 2, Treble, Middle, Bass, Master Volume and Vibe controls along with Master Volume in/out switch, standby and power switches. Rear panel: Solid State/Tube rectifier switch, 2 x EL84/4 x EL84, Triode/Pentode and Cathode bias/Fixed bias switches along with two speaker outs

DIMENSIONS 254mm high, 550mm wide, 230mm deep
WEIGHT 16kg/36lbs

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**Like this?
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Budda

Superdrive 18 head
The Budda doesn't model any particular amplifier in the manner of the 1836c but it's a similar deal in terms of chasing quality tone. Like all Budda amps, the Superdrive 18 hates your eardrums and wants to destroy them... but you'll enjoy the process

RRP £1327

Mesa Boogie

Lone Star head
A different kettle of fish, but the Fender-style cleans and buttery overdrives which evoke Marshall goodness are very seductive indeed. Allied to great flexibility, the Lone Star delivers on many different levels

RRP £1938

selecting two or four power valves), choose whether you want a tube or solid state rectifier, set the amp to pentode or triode mode, and finally plump for cathode bias or fixed bias. It's a great tool set for nailing vintage-style tones.

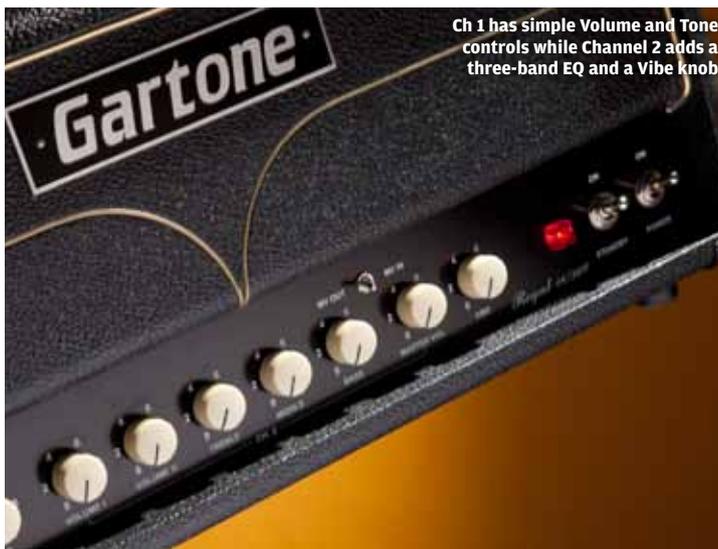
Also worthy of note is the attention to detail when it comes to the rather less glamorous parts of your amplifier - the transformers. Our review model is wired to work in 8 Ohms to match the V30-loaded 2x12" cab we used for testing. Naturally if you were to order your own it would be wired to match your configuration; you can even specify the ability to switch ohmage, although that involves having a different output transformer fitted. Here the transformer has some trick wiring which, when you switch the amp to 18W mode, aims to make the amp sound like it's a true 18W amplifier rather than a 36W amplifier running on half power. The difference isn't immense but it's certainly there, and it's another indication of the attention to detail you'll find with the Regal.

Sounds

Before we get to the tone or usability, one big thing needs to be pointed out: although this is definitely a two-channel amplifier there is no built-in solution

The Vibe control opens up a whole can of nostalgia for a gorgeous clean tone that's starting to bite around the edges

for switching channels. As in the days of old, if you want to switch to Ch 2 then you have to unplug your jack for Ch 1 and plug into input 2. If channel switching is important to you then investing in a decent A/B box should definitely be part of your plans. That said, let's get on to the juicy part.



Ch 1 has simple Volume and Tone controls while Channel 2 adds a three-band EQ and a Vibe knob

The Regal comes with a handy little guide suggesting the best way to set up some specific amp types, and this seemed as good a place as any to begin. In a rare display of sequential logic we decided to start with Channel 1 to see if the hard-faced Vox-style sparkle was really on tap. After a few moments of switching and checking we flipped the standby switch and, well... we were floored, partly by the accuracy of tone and partly by the fact we'd wound up the volume control and forgotten to

you switch out the master volume and go all old school. A quick fiddle with the settings saw us nailing some seriously chewy British Invasion tones but give the gain posts a twist in the direction of 'loud' and dial in more Vibe and you're sailing on a sea of stoner rock so deliciously fuzzy you'll feel as if you've gained flared pants and small pupils.

Finally the ability to map your own voicings using the various switches adds yet another level of sophistication. Want that Marshall-type tone but at a lower wattage, perhaps with a different triode setting? No problem, simply do that and you'll create your own vintage amp which never existed but really should.

Verdict

It's hard not to be too gushing about an amp that delivers exactly what it says on the tin, and the Regal delivers in spades. Yes, we'd have loved an effects loop in there, but retro does come with a price. Speaking of price, that's another attractive aspect of the amp. While it's not exactly chickenfeed, it's very reasonable for a handwired boutique amplifier. And a boutique amplifier is exactly what the Regal 18/36 is. If nailing vintage Vox and Marshall-type tones using an amp of impeccable build quality is your thing, then you'd be rather more than remiss in not considering the Gartone. 🎸

turn it back down. Rarely has 18W been so physical! The sounds are all here, and playing with the Vibe control opens up a whole can of nostalgia allowing you to nail a gorgeous, loose clean tone that's just starting to bite around the edges.

We could spend more than our allotted space covering the Ch 1 sounds alone, but the need to wallow in some '70s Marshall-style madness was becoming a little too much to bear. If Ch 1 is a nostalgia machine then Ch 2 is a grin factory. From warm, defined clean tones through to a disturbingly accurate 'I think my Plexi is about to explode' distortion, it's all in here. The ability to engage the master volumes for these amp styles is a genuine bonus and the effect on the tone, we are happy to report, is pretty minimal. It's almost eerie how accurate some of the Regal's sounds are... and not only accurate, but also available without splitting your eardrums in two. Be under no illusions, though, the Regal is easily capable of moving your internal organs around if



Rear panel switches take care of output power, rectifier type, pentode/triode mode or cathode/fixed bias

FINAL SCORE	
GARTONE REGAL 1836C	
Build Quality	20/20
Playability	19/20
Sound	19/20
Value for money	17/20
Looks	18/20
TOTAL	93%