



GARTONE Regal 15

Born as a custom build for a client who wanted a British-voiced amp for smaller gigs with a low-power option for home use, the Regal 15 has now been added to Gartone's line up. Review by **Huw Price**

Many great amps have begun life as one-offs. In this case Martin Gartone's brief was for an amp that would give British-flavoured sounds from two differently-voiced channels. It needed to work with both humbuckers and single-coils, and it had to have transformer-driven valve spring reverb on both channels. The result is the brand-new Gartone Regal 15.

According to Gartone, the classic small British amp formula combines a low-gain preamp with an easy-to-overdrive output stage. On the Regal 15, the half-power triode setting allows you to get compressed and overdriven tones at lower levels, while full power pentode mode is loud enough for gigging.

Channel 1 has a single gain stage with Volume and a single Tone control before the phase inverter. Channel 2 is based on a 'Plexi' circuit, with controls numbering Volume, Treble, Middle and Bass. There are two gain stages, but no cathode follower. The power valves are cathode biased with no negative feedback. A 5Y3 rectifier tube is used rather than an E281 because of its more robust construction and the fact that it's less prone to microphonics.

The open-backed cabinet is made from 15mm birch ply, and onboard goodies include Mercury Magnetics transformers and a 25W Teyden alnico speaker. An angled plywood baffle is



The Regal 15 has top-notch components throughout and impeccable build quality

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installed to deflect soundwaves away from the EL84s and prolong power valve life. Gartone has constructed the circuit on glass epoxy turret board using selected high-end components and, as we have come to expect from this builder, the quality of the workmanship and finish is top notch.

Sounds

We're all accustomed to amps with a clean channel and one or more 'dirty' channels, but on the Regal 15 the brief to have different voicings for each

channel has been met with spectacular success. Put simply, Channel 1 sounds like a non-Top Boost Vox and Channel 2 sounds just like a Marshall without tinnitus-inducing volume levels.

If you've ever had the good fortune to plug into a well-sorted AC15, turn it right up and play a power chord, you'll recognise Channel 1. At higher volumes you get a full bodied, purring overdrive, thickened by harmonic overtones. There's no spikiness, and when you pick out the notes of a chord the Regal 15 responds with jangle

FACTFILE GARTONE REGAL 15

DESCRIPTION 15W/7.5W twin-channel all-valve combo with 12" speaker. Made in the UK
PRICE £1650 (£1495 with Teyden Ceramic)

CONTROLS Volume & Tone (Channel 1), Volume, Treble, Middle, Bass (Channel 2), Half/Full power switch, Reverb (both channels)

SPECS Two EL84 power valves, 5Y3 rectifier, three ECC83s, one ECC81, Mercury Magnetics transformers, turret board construction, birch ply cabinet, extension speaker jack

DIMENSIONS 508mm high, 410mm wide, 228mm deep
WEIGHT 20kg/44lbs

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1973X**

Marshall's handwired reissue of the legendary 18W combo with a 12" Greenback and a point-to-point tagboard circuit, plus tremolo rather than a three-band EQ
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London Pro
An 18W cathode-biased EL84 combo which offers the choice of the sound of the original rocky, bluesy London or the tone of an AC15 - or you can combine the two channels, with a six-way switch adjusting the mid focus. Comes with a 12" Celestion
RRP £1599

Fargen

AC Duo Tone
This Fargen design promises two channels to cover 'all of your EL84 Brit-tone needs'. The V15 channel is based on a AC30, the M18 channel is all about Marshall. Mercury Magnetics transformers, cathode biasing and a WGS Green Beret speaker
RRP £2199

Despite the very Bletchley-flavoured looks the Regal can deliver a whole lot more



and chime. It's not all about overdrive and, although never truly 'clean' in the technical sense, overdrive only really kicks in at around 4 on the Volume.

The key to the success of Channel 1 is the Tone control. Unlike certain old Vox amps, this channel never sounds dull because above the midway point the Tone knob actually adds presence, only rolling off highs below this point. The midrange will always sound thick and woody and the bass will always sound big, but at least you have dominion over the amount of cut and bite. At higher Tone settings the Regal 15 even manages a hint of Fender-like twang and quack, but the speaker and power section keep things resolutely British.

Channel 2 replaces the purr of Channel 1 with a full-throated roar. The EQ controls may seem straightforward but they exert such a strong influence over such a wide range that some experimentation is required to explore the full range of tones. The trick is to move the controls slowly and listen carefully to the changes.

There's a little more gain, but it's remarkable how well the volume levels of both channels balance out. At equivalent settings, Channel 2 can be dishing up the dirt while Channel 1 is handling milder overdrive. There's

The Regal 15 is different to many small valve amps and it goes beyond boutique politeness into ruder tonal territory

no onboard channel switching, but an external switcher should work fine and the low level inputs add versatility.

Channel 2 doesn't have Channel 1's pure, straight-through quality, but it has a far wider range of tones. Garton has chosen the centre frequencies for the EQ controls with care, and they proved effective with all our test guitars. Mids can be scooped and treble and bass boosted for huge clean and semi-dirty Hendrix tones that have an almost Fender-like glassiness. You can boost the mids and adjust the treble for the preferred degree of edge, and Channel 2 provides all the aggression you could need for heavy blues and classic rock.

Sustain is impressive and both channels respond well to playing dynamics and guitar volume roll-off. Depending on the pickups, we found they operated best with the channel volumes set between 5 and 8. When pushed harder we noticed a hint of papery fizz, especially on Channel 2, and low notes started getting a bit looser - just like many vintage low-power amps.

The reverb is a real bonus. It can get fairly cavernous but the dry sound still cuts through clearly even at maximum settings. It doesn't provide a surfy, dripping-off-the walls effect but rather a well-voiced ambience that adds a 3D quality to clean tones and remains unobtrusive with overdrive.

We also ran the Regal 15 through a Celestion G12 Greenback and a Jensen P12Q. The Tayden sounded clearer, brighter and louder, making it the best match for this amp by some distance.

Verdict

By the time we had to send the Regal 15 back, we still hadn't made up our minds which channel we preferred. Perhaps the TMB side favours humbucking guitars; perhaps single coils sang best through the Voxy channel... but too much depended on what we were actually playing to state this as an absolute. While many smaller valve amps produce refined overdrive at usable volume levels, they generally fall short of that 'big amp' excitement. The Regal 15 is different because it goes beyond boutique politeness into ruder and more brutish tonal territory. It can do the sweet stuff too, but you may find that full volume on both channels results in more distortion than you actually need. This is a positive, however, because it means that the volume controls stay effective across their whole ranges rather than hitting a point, about two thirds of the way up, beyond which nothing much changes. Most decent amps have a sweet spot - but with the Regal 15 we just kept on finding them. With this amp, you'll be spoiled for choice. 🎸



Quality glass, including two EL84s and full valve rectification

FINAL SCORE

GARTONE REGAL 15	
Build Quality	19/20
Versatility	19/20
Sound	18/20
Value for money	18/20
Vibe	18/20
TOTAL	92%