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Simple solution

Want an inexpensive combo packed with good sounds and a few simple effects to boot? Ah, trust Marshall, says Pete Crisp...

If proof were needed that life begins at 40, take a moment to cast your eyes over the ever-expanding Marshall range. Not content to rest on their laurels, the R&D boffins of this prestigious Brit company show a fearless desire to grasp 21st century solid-state technology and apply it with gusto to their designs. It may not be everyone's cup of tea – some of us are hell bent on extending the life of the venerable vacuum tube that lies at the heart of so many classic amps, and rightly so.

Yet getting that magical tone has downsides, not least cost and sheer bulk, so with these aims in mind Marshall has released its latest range of inexpensive, solid-state combos to whet your appetite. Built in India, the range offers output power from 10 to 100 watts, with a useable collection of added extras including digital effects and a CD input.

Pre & power amp

Sitting within the MG family – made up of eight combos and a 100W head – this little beast offers 50 watts of power via a

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MARSHALL MG50 DFX

GOLD STARS

★ Price
★ Versatile sounds
★ Sensible selection of useable effects

BLACK MARKS

● Bit of a gain leap between channels one and two

Ideal for...

Budget-conscious newcomers, clubs and pubs, rockin' practice sessions

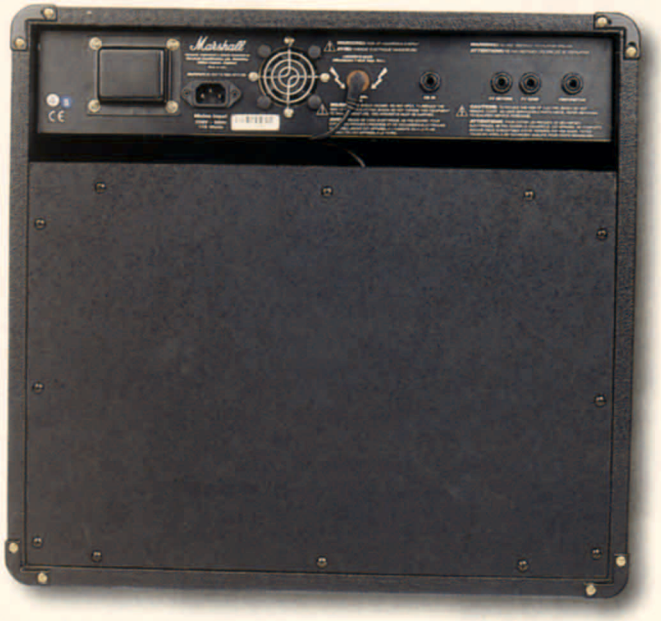
pair of footswitchable channels. The DFX part of the moniker relates to the onboard digital effects which we'll come onto in a bit.

Each channel gets its own set of tone controls, with the mid knob of channel two being replaced with a contour pot, seen on earlier Valvestate amps, and useful for dialling in that big, modern scooped tone.

The right-hand end of the front panel contains the master volume and reverb plus two knobs that look after effect level and selection. Marshall has opted for a rotary selector for this, with the sweep of the knob taking you smoothly through the four digital presets of chorus/delay, delay, chorus and flanging. The fact that the positions have no indents means there's a slight danger of inadvertently knocking your settings out of kilter, not good if you've spent time setting up the perfect delay speed for instance.

Considering the price, the MG50 incorporates a few other handy features that sit this combo on the fence between being a versatile practice tool and full-blown pub gig or recording unit. There's a standard jack input for a CD player on the rear panel that means jamming along to your favourite tracks is a breeze, plus a speaker-emulated headphone output that'll save you from annoying the neighbours. This also doubles as a line out so you can hook the amp up to a mixing desk. As well as the onboard effects, the MG also boasts send/return FX loop sockets for use with line-level outboard units.

The power amp stage is treated to a spot of FDD, that's 'frequency dependant damping' to you and me, which Marshall has developed to mimic the interactive traits of valves and speakers in an attempt to get nearer to classic tube tone using the less expensive solid-state technology.



CABINET & SPEAKER

While certainly lighter than a valve combo of similar output, the MG feels reassuringly solid without being overly cumbersome. The closed-back design sports all the usual robustness associated with a Marshall and the build quality is, as you'd expect, spot on. We may have seen the gold front panel and italicised logo a thousand times, but they never cease to ooze rock'n'roll, drumming up a passion from the look that few amps can match, indeed some things really are best left unchanged.

Whipping the back off the speaker enclosure reveals a 12-inch custom-voiced Celestion driver anchored firmly in place. Apart from that, all the workings are in the chassis above. This includes a cooling fan that at first seems quite audible but happily melts into the background when you start playing, even mic'd up and recorded it proves problem-free and, of course, you can always use the line out which ably reproduced the sound of the former method. The speaker connects to the amp by way of a quarter-inch angle jack which opens up the possibility of running a larger cab for more oomph to your elbow.

SOUNDS

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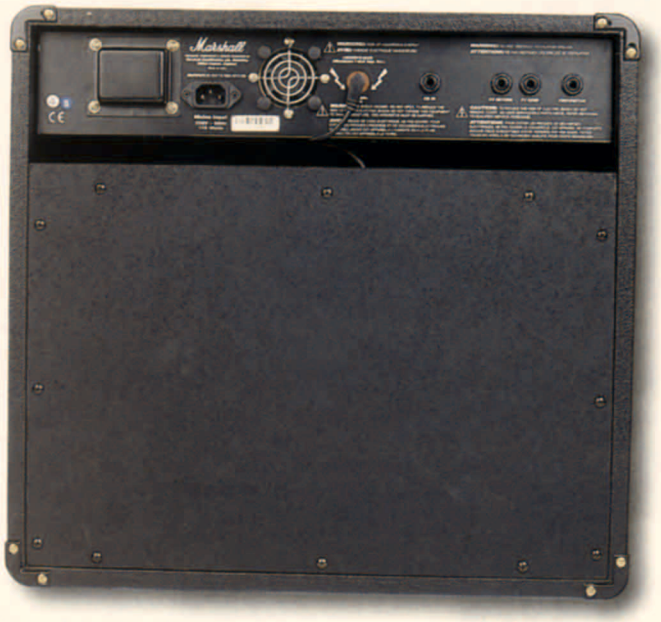

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tone department. Add to this the closed cabinet that offers solid lows and you end up feeling like you're in control of an amp somewhat larger in stature than your eyes tell you. Channel one stays clean even with the gain wound to its stop, and with some discreet reverb and subtle delay added the sound from a humbucking neck pickup is cosily warm and jazzy.

A tour of the digital effects offers plenty of possibilities, from the expansive chorus to the gentle whoosh of the flanger set to a slow rate. Taking this to its extreme brings forth a pseudo rotary speaker effect that warbles nicely with lazy ninth chords. This works even better with minimal gain on channel two, although some may feel the transition between clean and out-and-out dirt could be a bit too narrow with a relatively small amount of gain-control movement taking the MG into serious overdrive. On this channel you get to go mad with the contour control and it certainly does its job, allowing wide variations in those all important mids. If you're into grungy scooped sounds you'll be heading clockwise and riveting your granny to the wall with dropped tunings, while at the opposite end of the scale lurks more classic Marshall raunch better suited for SG-wielding schoolboys.

The MG certainly benefits from a push of the FDD button, getting a lift in definition all round, leaving you wondering why it's switchable at all; better to leave it activated we say. We're impressed with the relative lack of fizziness which can often be a bind with solid-state amps. It won't rival the heavyweights of the Marshall range for sheer brutality, but in its own way it delivers the goods in a distinctly British manner.

CONCLUSION

If you've been grabbed by the Marshall sound it's a hard habit to break. The gutsy, grinding tone of a full-blown stack has become synonymous with rock's raunchiest offerings, and over the years we've been presented with some truly inspirational amplifiers. The MG may not be on the same scale as some of these legends but it fills a gap that should see yet more youthful exuberance making haste towards the Marshall name. For the money this is an excellent amp that'll fill many roles; from hard-up garage bands to semi-pro musos who need a compact and versatile travelling companion.

DETAILS

FDD FOR THOUGHT

Attaining the characteristics that cooking valves impart on speakers has long been many amp designers' goal. Early attempts were spectacularly dismal, giving solid-state technology a rather poor name, but times really have changed and, while there is still no real substitute, you can get a totally credible approximation. Marshall reckons its Frequency Dependant Damping is another step in the right direction. It certainly beefs up the MG's tone, giving a snappy response to pick work and accentuating the dynamics.

THE LOWDOWN

MARSHALL MG50 DFX — **Price:** £249

Built in:	India
Type:	1x12 solid state combo
Power:	50 watts RMS
Features:	Two independent channels, contour control on channel two, FDD, reverb, delay, chorus, flanging, effects loop, CD input, speaker-emulated headphone/line out
Speaker:	One 12-inch Celestion custom-voiced
Footswitch:	Channel switching and effects on/off included
Dimensions:	498(h) x 518(w) x 275(d)mm
Contact	Marshall Amplification
Phone	01908 375411
Web	www.marshallamps.com
GB RATING	

UP FRONT

You can switch the two independent channels either by the supplied footswitch or the small push button to the right of channel one. This channel only offers a gain knob for level control, while Channel Two has an additional volume pot. The digital effects are selected with the preset/adjust knob, while a neighbouring level control dictates the wet/dry mix. A sensible range of effects and they're dead easy to use.