

# MARSHALL

## 85th Celebration Special Edition 1923C Dual Super Lead

**A very special amp celebrating the 85th birthday of the Guv'nor himself, Jim Marshall.**



Words: Tim Slater

**MARSHALL**

Special Edition JCM2000

Combo £1,096.17  
Head £910.21

All prices incl VAT

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**WHAT IS IT?**  
A limited edition 50 watt combo and head commemorating the 85th birthday of Marshall Amplification founder, Dr. Jim Marshall OBE.

**WHY SHOULD I WANT ONE?**  
All-tube signal path, awesome tones and an image that states beyond any doubt that you rock! What more do you need, frankly?

**The story** of Marshall Amplification needs no retelling here but if you haven't had a chance to furnish yourself with the stirring tale of how Jim Marshall and his small team completely changed the sound of rock music, building guitar amplifiers and speaker cabinets from the small backroom of Jim's music store, then you should. The very first Marshall amps were hand built specials but once word began to spread among London's tightly knit musical community, guitarists and bass players were literally queuing up to experience this thrilling new – and very loud – sound, leading Jim to expand his business and embark on a remarkable career that sees the former professional jazz drummer and nightclub crooner still sagely guiding his company, despite reluctantly accepting semi-retirement due to his advancing years and a need to look after his health. In July 2008 the Marshall team presented Jim with a special

custom-made 1923C JCM2000 Dual Super Lead 50 watt combo that had been modified with a special front panel featuring the 85th Celebration logo alongside a full-colour Union Jack. Initially a one-off, Marshall Amplification has now released the Ltd Edition production version of Jim's birthday present; the 85th Celebration DSL 50 is virtually an exact copy of the unique 1923C 212 combo presented to Jim. The amp is also available as a Ltd Edition JCM 2000 DSL 50 head, but whichever model you choose, both are a genuine treat for serious Marshall fans and collectors. Each individual Ltd Edition 85th Celebration amplifier ships with a production certificate signed by everyone in the Marshall factory involved in the construction of each individual amp, plus the signature of Jim Marshall himself. Marshall has even thrown in a copy of Rich Maloof's *Jim Marshall: The Father of Loud*, an excellent biography of Dr. Jim Marshall OBE

detailing his classic rags-to-riches life story alongside diagrams of famous Marshall player's set-ups and a potted history of the brand's most famous models. You get the impression that the 85th Celebration Marshall amps are very much a labour of love. Let's feel a bit more of that love and check out the combo version of this rare and exciting new edition to the Marshall family.

### Unchanged Melody

The DSL series amps have been around unchanged for over a decade now and for very good reason. They are simply among some of the best-sounding Marshall amps ever made. Originally a four-strong range comprising two combos – 20 watt and 40 watt models – plus a pair of 50 watt and 100 watt heads, the standard DSL series currently stands at three models after the 20 watt combo was dropped from the range a few years ago. The DSL series is remarkable in that it accurately



reproduces several of Marshall's best-loved vintage tones, while adding a couple of modern twists that also make it a superb contemporary-sounding rock amplifier. And it does this with a bare minimum of controls, maintaining Marshall's traditional 'plug-in-and-play' simplicity within a very sophisticated and versatile framework.

Word on the street is that the DSL series is getting a bit long in the tooth and so it could be in line to be discontinued fairly soon. If this

deliver a very workable blend of clean and dirty sounds, or crunch rhythm and high-gain lead, depending how each channels voicing controls are set. Individual gain and volume controls on both channels are linked to a mode switch that alters each channel's gain structure, enabling the user to dial-in whatever type of sonic signature they require. Classic gain is best viewed as the DSL's 'clean' channel and indeed its two switchable voicing modes alternate between sparkling clean sounds

aural illusion that the low and treble frequencies are both boosted. The idea is that you can create a nice 'smiley face' EQ curve without the need to crank up the amp's bass and treble controls to the max and thus compromise your favourite settings. However, if you still feel that you need even more low-end thump, the Deep switch changes the value of the negative feedback between the amps output stage and the speakers, lowering the speakers' damping factor and adding extra

**“The Ltd Edition 85th Celebration amps are sure to sell out pretty fast, so you are strongly advised to snap one up...”**

is true, and we hope that it isn't, you are well advised to snap up a DSL amp and hang onto it. These amps are already viewed as classics among the Marshall pantheon and once they have ceased production they will probably be elevated to the same legendary status as the highly venerated JCM800 and 900 models, whose deliciously warm crunchy tones the JCM series also emulates convincingly.

### Duellin' the Fun

The DSL series are twin-channel amps, which might not seem all that much on paper compared to some of the more complex multi-channel guitar amplifiers out there – including Marshall's own TSL (Triple Super Lead) series – but the DSL's apparent simplicity conceals a very clever tone network that is fairly sophisticated internally but presented to the user in a beautifully simple way.

The DSL features all-tube circuitry comprising 12AX7 preamp valves and a pair of EL34s driving the output stage. Whereas the JCM 800 and 900 used a distorting diode to generate their overdrive tones, the JCM 2000's all-tube signal path results in a much more flexible overdrive with superior dynamics and you can definitely hear this in the JCM 2000's awesome tonal range, which is spread between two versatile independent channels.

The DSL's separate Classic and Ultra channels can be selected via a footswitch and are configured to

and an overdrive mode that ranges between the typical gutsy dynamic thump of a vintage style Marshall Plexi amp and the more aggressive tone of the first master volume Marshalls from the early 1970s.

Between the volume and gain controls, both modes offer a phenomenal amount of scope and it is worth pointing out that the DSL's clean channel is one of the best in the business. Virtually any clean tone that you will ever need; ranging from frigid super-clean tones to a warm mildly overdriven bounce can be dialed in virtually as fast as it takes to switch the amp on; no fuss, no bother and an absolute piece of cake to set up. The Ultra channel works on a similar principal to the Classic channel: a mode switch toggles between two separate gain and voicing structures beginning with a meaty JCM800-style overdrive before kicking up a few more gears to an unrepentantly modern-style high gain distortion. Each mode's distinctive signature is strong and flexible enough by itself but to help add an extra bit of versatility, the DSL also includes two global voicing switches that alter the amp's overall tonal flavour: Tone Shift is probably best described as the DSL's own instant 'thrash' control; when active it kicks-in a preset EQ curve with pronounced midrange scoop. Scooping out the mids changes the tone of the amp dramatically; the lowered mid-range creates the

low-end boost. Basically, the amp's lowered damping factor is tuned to match the speaker cabinet's optimum resonant frequency and allows the ever-reliable Celestion G12 speakers to 'flap' around more inside the speaker cabinet, creating a BIG sound without drawing any extra headroom

from the amp's output stage.

In a nutshell, the DSL is a very easy amp to like; the classic 50 watt EL34-driven valve output stage kicks out more than enough volume for larger stages whilst also remaining a smooth, slightly compressed sound that is more easily adapted to small pub venues and the recording studio than the more aggressive 100 watt DSL head, which is still no less versatile than its smaller siblings. As you've probably guessed by now, we are big fans of the DSL but our enthusiasm is borne out by the quality of the sounds on tap. In its own way, the DSL is a masterpiece; it is amazingly versatile while being almost ridiculously easy to use and still sounds and feels like a classic Marshall amplifier from top to bottom, with no compromises. There are other amps out there that can justifiably claim to offer lots more in terms of features and if you feel comfortable with that approach, then fine. However, if you appreciate good honest tone with a capital 'T' then the Marshall DSL series will provide a lifetime's worth of top-notch tone for a competitive price. These limited edition 85th Celebration models are sure to sell out pretty fast, so you are strongly advised to snap one up. We hope that Jim Marshall is around to celebrate his 100th birthday and if the awesome DSL is still the Marshall amp chosen to commemorate that momentous event, we couldn't think of anything more suitable. **PU**



None more rock: The 85th Celebration head powers the classic Marshall half-stack