

It's well loud but will still fit into the back seat of your car

Two-way footswitch selects the channel and turns the effects on and off



CD in and headphone/line out sockets are great for practice and recording



MARSHALL MG100DFX

A compact all-rounder with a great sound – and it won't make you broke

Words: Trevor Curwen

Hurrah! It's a Marshall!

Yes, it's a Marshall and an affordable one too, at less than £300. Britain's biggest and best-known amp maker has come up with a combo that's small enough to fit on the back seat of a Reliant Robin but still puts out a healthy 100 watts through its 12-inch Celestion, which makes it great for gigging. Not only that, but it's got a bunch of features that also make it ideal for practising. Best of both worlds, eh?

So is it a real Marshall with valves?

Well, it's a real Marshall alright, but there are no valves – this is strictly solid-state territory. What you do get, however, is Marshall's FDD (Frequency Dependent Damping) technology which mimics the way that an all-valve amp interacts with a loudspeaker, giving a lot more of a dynamic feel like you get when using an amp with a valve output stage. The FDD function is turned on by a small front-panel switch and the sound is so valve-like that you'll want to leave it on permanently.

How many channels has it got?

Two – clean and overdrive – but each of them has a pair of gain variations selected by front-panel switches; so in effect you have four channels (the clean channel can be set for clean or crunch and the overdrive channel for OD or OD2). The supplied footswitch only lets you switch between the two main channels, but that still gives you four switching options to choose from depending on the setting of the front-panel variation switches: clean/OD1, clean/OD2, crunch/OD1 and crunch/OD2.

Any effects?

Oh yeah, there are built-in effects too. The second switch on the footswitch unit turns those on and off. Basically, you get one of

£299

INFO

Power output: 100W RMS
Speaker: 1 x 12" custom-designed Celestion
Connections: input, CD in, emulated line out/headphones, FX send, FX return, footswitch
Effects: reverb, delay, flanger, chorus, chorus/delay
Dimensions: 590 x 595 x 275 mm
Weight: 23.6 kg
Contact: Marshall 01908 375411
Web: www.marshall-lamps.com

four effects that are selected by a rotary knob. As you sweep through each segment, you can adjust one main parameter for the associated effect. What you get is chorus with adjustable speed, flanger with adjustable speed, delay with adjustable delay time and a combination effect of chorus plus delay with adjustable delay time.

In addition to these there's a totally independent digital reverb with its very own knob.

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So I won't need my pedals?

As you can only have one effect at a time (plus reverb, of course) you'll still need to use pedals or a processor if you want multiple effects and the MG100DFX has a parallel effects loop with sockets on the rear panel so you can connect these. There's a front-panel FX mix knob that allows you to blend in as much of the effects loop with the normal amp sound as you like.

What are those extra sockets on the front panel for?

Ah, now this is what makes this amp so versatile. Marshall reckons that the technology employed in the MG range can deliver full tone at all volume levels from gigs to quiet late-night practice – and those sockets are there to help you with practice. One socket is a stereo input that allows you to plug in a tape or CD player for jamming along with,

while the second allows you to plug in a pair of headphones so you don't have to annoy the neighbours (unless you really want to). The headphone level can be adjusted using the clean channel gain control and the overdrive channel volume control, while the master volume control works purely on the speaker output, so you can silence it completely. The output socket is speaker-emulated so not only do you get a realistic sound through your headphones you can also use it for direct recording by connecting it straight to your multitrack or soundcard.

100 watts for less than £300? Bet it sounds crap...

Completely the opposite – it sounds really good. This amp is capable of a wide range of sounds, the effects add a lovely bit of extra flavour and the reverb is well spacey. The clean channel does exactly what it says on the tin, but stick in the crunch switch and you get some well raunchy stuff that's great for leads as well as powerful rhythm.

The overdrive channel's OD1 setting is classic Marshall, while OD2 provides full-on saturated high-gain sounds. On top of that there's plenty of tonal variation on offer as each channel has independent bass, middle and treble controls. The overdrive channel even goes one further with a contour control which is brilliant for sucking out the midrange for that nu-metal sound.

So why should I get one for Christmas?

Because it sounds great, is easy to transport, and is suitable for gigging, silent practice and recording. It also costs less than the average UK weekly wage.

But the big fella probably won't be able to get one down your chimney...

RATING



Alternatively

Fender Stage 100DSP – £469
 Peavey Transtube 112FX – £239
 Crate GFX120 – £399