

Marshall JVM 205C 2 x 12 combo £939

Marshall sets out to create an amp that's all things to all players - and we reckon this just might be it... *by Nick Guppy*

What we want to know

- 1 What the hell is MIDI?**
Oh come on. After all this time, guitar players still fear it? Musical Instrument Digital Interface is a protocol that lets stuff like keyboards, effects units, mixers and so on talk to each other. And amps, of course...
- 2 And a through-plated PCB?**
An expensive type of printed circuit board that puts a round solder pad on both sides of the board at every hole and joins them with a tiny tube. It's ideal for valve amps where heat and flexing are the main enemies.
- 3 Who is this amp for?**
Anyone who can afford it should try it out - if your preconception of Marshalls is that they sound great for aggressive rock only, prepare for a major rethink.

You could forgive the major amp manufacturers for not introducing new models in the current unpredictable financial climate. Nevertheless, Marshall has chosen this year to release the eagerly awaited JVM205 range - eagerly awaited because it sits quite neatly in the middle between the flagship JVM4's MIDI-powered four-channel flexibility and the organic old-school minimalism of the KT66-powered Vintage Modern, and is likely to provide an ideal blend of features for most modern players. It's the nature of mass-produced products like the JVM that they're built to a price, although Marshall has perfected its production methods to the point where there is no sacrifice in quality. Like all modern Marshalls, the JVM205 benefits from a tough ply cabinet and a hefty steel chassis, which combines with a pair of Celestion 12-inch drivers to provide a substantial package that's no lightweight. Yet it's still very portable, thanks to the relatively compact dimensions and a pair of side-mounted grab handles that

make lifting and carrying so much easier. The rear of the cabinet looks a little different because of the two perforated grilles, which provide room for the Celestion drivers to breathe and prevent damage to the output valves. We think the JVM205's dimensions are particularly pleasing to the eye - the extra depth of the control panel works well and helps create a blend of appealing visual proportions. Inside the chassis, modern production dictates that nearly everything is PCB-mounted. Apart from the two Dagnall transformers, the majority of preamp, output stage and power supply components sit on one large high-quality PCB which is fixed to the chassis by sturdy bolted metal standoffs. Double-sided and through-plated, this board contains all the high voltage stuff including the valve bases and most of the rear panel components, with a small daughter board attached to it for the JVM's digital reverb. A separate single-sided PCB sat just behind the front panel handles the

pot and switches, with other small boards for the speaker outlets and input jack. The PCB-mounted valve bases mean the preamp valves are quite deeply recessed and difficult to change quickly - also, the loudspeaker connections are made with spade connectors which have a tendency to work loose over time. These two minor niggles aside, the overall impression is of a well thought out design that will easily cope with pro-level use.

On the features front, the JVM has practically everything most guitar players could ask for, and then some. There are two channels which both offer three different voicings, accessed from the channel mode switches. Both channels have the standard complement of gain, bass, mid, treble and master volume, as well as separate level controls for the JVM's digital reverb. There are also front panel controls for presence and resonance, which fine tune the power amp's high and low frequency response, and two master volume controls that can be set to different levels.

On the rear panel, the JVM205C also benefits from two effects loops (one series, the other parallel), a speaker emulated balanced line out, no less than five speaker jacks and MIDI. MIDI means that you can control any switch setting and send/receive

The Rivals

Vox's AC30CC2X combo (£1,119) takes the classic 2 x 12 combo and gives it a much-needed new lease of life with this Chinese-made version; the Alnico Blue speakers add a touch of real boutique cred to the finished product. **Peavey's Valve King 2 x 12** (£449) is a proper four-valve 6L6-powered 2 x 12 combo for under £450. It may not have all the bells and whistles of the Marshall but it has a better than average tone and that price. **Fender's Cyberwin SE combo** (£1,550) uses MIDI to power practically everything, including cool motorised knobs that remember every nuance of your favourite tone and a staggeringly powerful built-in effects processor. If you love playing with presets this one comes highly recommended.



One of the two loops: versatile indeed

program change commands, effectively turning the JVM into a highly versatile six-channel tone machine. Add to that a very clever footswitch that can be used to store presets or emulate the front panel switches and you've really got something – but these features are of little worth if the JVM doesn't cut the tonal mustard...

Sounds

Thankfully, the JVM205C is among the best-sounding new Marshalls we've played in years. The clean/crunch channel can go from pristine sparkling clarity to a pretty aggressive JCM800-inspired crunch, while the lead channel's three modes take over from there and add progressively more gain, taking you from archetypal classic blues/rock to searing, mega-gained ballad solos and practically everything in between. It's not just the range of tone and gain that impresses us

here it's also the quality. You could easily cut an entire album with the lead channel's green mode alone – it's that good. And the other modes are more or less up to the same standard. It's only at the two extremes where things can be a little less than totally inspiring – high gain on the lead channel's red mode tends to turn mushy and lose dynamic response, but this applies to practically all high-gain amplifiers. And for ultra-clean fat jazz or country tones the JVM's response is a little too punchy – but hey, this is a Marshall!

It's not all by-the-book stuff either – the JVM packs two different types of loudspeaker (a G12 Vintage and a G12 Heritage) which are wired in series, not parallel. This adds a complex, looser feel to the JVM's response – it's a clever trick that's often used on expensive boutique amps.

The switching and MIDI functions work seamlessly and are simple to use – a sure sign that an awful lot of work went into getting them right. Basically, all front panel switches remember their last setting, so if you select say, orange mode with reverb for the clean/crunch channel, that's what you'll get when you switch back to it from the lead channel. It's worth mentioning MIDI control is limited to the front panel switch settings, not the position of the rotary controls. We think that's actually a good thing. Full MIDI control is often a pain to set up and self-defeating in use – you end up playing with presets not music.

The reverb is rewarding to use, it's a warm hall type which sounds natural and decays smoothly with no digital clatter.

Verdict

All of the JVM205C's features make sense and, even though there are two less channels than you'd get in a JVM4, it's still a ferociously versatile tone machine that doesn't force you to understand a lot of technical stuff in order to use it. That and the sheer quality of the sounds it produces are two very good reasons for getting one. And if that isn't enough, the price should make up your mind. In a market sector with more than its fair share of indifferent, run-of-the-mill black boxes, Marshall has just unleashed a powerhouse of tone that could easily compete with boutique designs costing two or even three times as much. If Marshall was trying to create the ultimate sub-£1,000 guitar amp, it can give itself a pat on the back, because this one provides pretty much everything you could possibly ask for. Ignore it at your peril! ☑

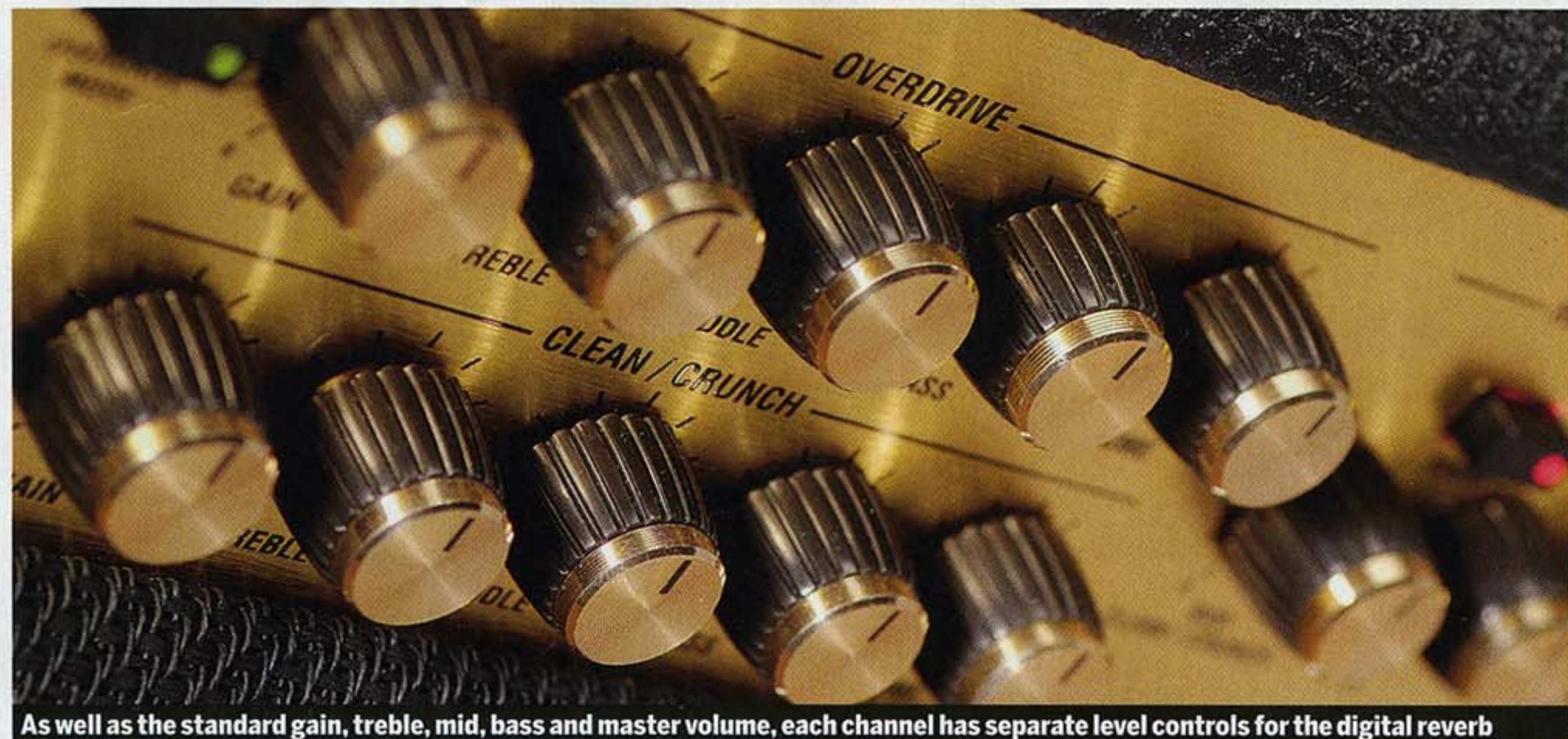
The bottom line

We like: Superb range of tones and features at an affordable price, and it has that name on the front

We dislike: Lacks a little in dynamic range at extreme gain levels, but apart from that this is a superb all-rounder

Guitarist says: If you want a great all-round amp for a good price the JVM is going to be very, very hard to beat.

The clean/crunch channel can go from pristine sparkling clarity to a pretty aggressive JCM800-inspired crunch



As well as the standard gain, treble, mid, bass and master volume, each channel has separate level controls for the digital reverb



Marshall JVM 205C 2 x 12 combo

PRICE: £939

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: All valve, two-channel combo with solid-state rectification.

OUTPUT: 50 watts RMS

VALVES: 5 x ECC83/12AX7 preamp, 2 x EL34 power amp

DIMENSIONS: 500 (h) x 700 (w) x 270mm (d)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 29/61

CABINET: 15mm ply

LOUDSPEAKER: One Celestion G12 Vintage 12-inch, one Celestion G12 Heritage 12-inch, series wired

CHANNELS: Two, each with three individual voicings which can be preset or recalled via footswitch and/or MIDI

CONTROLS: Gain, bass mid, treble, channel volume, reverb level, master volume x 2. Presence and resonance

FOOTSWITCH: Supplied four-way footswitch can be used to operate front panel switch settings (channel mode, reverb, effects loop, master volume level select etc) or remember patch presets

ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Series effects loop with bypass function, parallel effects loop with mix level and line level switch, speaker emulated balanced line out which can be used for silent recording in standby mode, digital reverb and MIDI in/thru

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: JVM210H 100-watt head (£889), JVM205H 50 watt head (£765), JVM 210C 100-watt 2 x 12 combo (£1,049), JVM215C 1 x 12 combo (£859)

Marshall 01908 375411

www.marshallamps.com



Test results

Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★