

Marshall



Marshall

# WHEN I'M 66

IT'S NEW, IT'S RELATIVELY AFFORDABLE, AND IT RECAPTURES THE SPIRIT OF '60S AND '70S CLASSIC ROCK AND BLUES. **MICK TAYLOR** WELCOMES THE MARSHALL THAT'S OLD, NEW, BORROWED AND... PURPLE?

**...** If there's one phrase that sums up the prevailing trend in current rock, blues-rock and guitar pop music, it has to be 'vintage modern'. We're talking classic inspired guitar tones, made available through new equipment that irons out the less desirable attributes of old gear, such as erratic performance and reliability, limited functionality and frankly scary prices.

So, eschewing any cryptic or even mildly suggestive monikers, the folks at Bletchley have, shall we say, 'done a Ronseal' and made no bones as to the intentions of their new all-valve baby. It's 'Vintage' in its tonal stamp, and 'Modern' with the addition of versatile, player-friendly features. An extension of the JCM2000 DSL series, then? Not on your nelly.

The big news is that these are the first 'normal' 50- and 100-watt Marshalls (that's to say, not reissues or limited editions) for decades to dispense with the erstwhile EL34, making way for KT66s in the output section. These are the same glowing glass bottles used for Eric Clapton's legendary 1962 'Bluesbreaker' combo, beginning a number of twists on the classic Marshall formula we've come to know and love. The big question is, will we love this?

## PRE & POWER AMP

The all-new Vintage Modern amplifier is based around just a single channel. In an age of a million digital modelling presets and multi-mode tube amps, that may seem somewhat lacking. Yet this is a big part of the whole amp's conception, in that it's designed to appeal to players who like to 'work' the amplifier from their guitar's volume control for dynamics and texture. Getting just the right balance of gain for different guitar

players and instruments in one channel is no easy job, however, so engineer Steve Dawson and the team at Marshall have added a number of features to maximise versatility, without compromising the plug-in-and-play approach.

Firstly, you get the dual 'frequency selectable' gain controls that add gain to the 'body' (bottom end) and 'detail' (high end) separately. According to Steve Dawson, 'detail' works on frequencies above 400Hz and 'body' works on those below 400Hz. After that, Vintage Modern amps also have a mid-boost function – selectable with a push switch on the front panel – which gives you a real kick in the guts around 400Hz by about 20dBV. Depending where you have gains set, this ushers in a considerable swathe of boost, adding girth and drive to fatten single coils, or to push humbuckers into super mid-rich harmonic bliss.

Then comes the 'dynamic range' mode switch, something that's footswitchable with Marshall's included solid stomper. This brings in another preamp tube's worth of gain for higher overdrive and distortion sounds. As with the mid boost, you'll want to tweak the gain controls to suit the high dynamic range mode, not least because the bottom end can become overly heavy if you've been pushing the cleaner mode hard for your ideal tone and response. In this respect, there is some compromise involved in setting up two footswitchable sounds; some sort of control over the higher dynamic range setting would help here. There are no such worries for setting up one basic tonal platform however, the dual gains, master volume, three-band EQ and presence pot offering enough control to suit any kind of guitar and the vast majority of classic rock and blues playing styles.

## GBINFO

Marshall

### MARSHALL VINTAGE MODERN 2266 HEAD

PRICE: £673  
 BUILT IN: England  
 TYPE: All-valve head  
 POWER: 50 watts  
 VALVES: 4 x ECC83, 2 x KT66

FEATURES: Single channel with footswitchable 'high' and 'low' dynamic range modes, dual gain controls, mid boost, digital reverb, series effects loop (-10/+4dB), FX loop bypass switch, 2 x extension speaker out (4 or 8 ohms)

FOOTSWITCH: 2-button Marshall PEDL-00041 included (boost and reverb)

DIMENSIONS: 750(w) x 310(h) x 230(d) mm

WEIGHT: 18kg (39.7lbs)

OPTIONS: 2466 100-watt head (£757), 2266C combo (£796)

### MARSHALL 425A 4x12 CABINET

PRICE: £490

BUILT IN: England

POWER HANDLING: 100 watts mono @ 4 or 16 ohms. 50+50 watts stereo @ 8 ohms/8 ohms

SPEAKERS: 4 x 12-inch Celestion G12C

FEATURES: Castors included. Angled (425A) and base (425B) variants available

DIMENSIONS: 770(h) x 755(w) x 365(d) mm

WEIGHT: 36kg (79.4lbs)

CONTACT: Marshall Amplification plc

PHONE: 01908 375411

WEB: www.marshallamps.com

ROUTE 66

THE STORY OF THE KINKLESS TETRODE

■ The original KT66 output valve – used in the first ever Marshall 100-watt stacks and Eric Clapton's 'Bluesbreaker' combo – was the English equivalent to the popular American 6L6.

According to Aspen Pitman in *The Tube Amp Book* they're freely interchangeable in any amp circuit (subject to the correct bias adjustment of course). The tube gets its 'KT' suffix because of its 'kinkless tetrode' design, developed by the MO Valve Company in the UK, which removed the 'kink' in the response curve of a 6L6-type tube. As a result, again according to Pitman, the original KT66 has a smoother, more linear mid-range response than a 6L6, making it closer to an EL34 in some respects,



albeit with a softer attack and smoother overdrive. Marshall tells us its new KT66s are from the Chinese Shuangang factory, a reliable source with good tone too.

The inclusion of a digital reverb section will send a few eyebrows shooting skywards – firstly because there's reverb included at all in a classic-inspired Marshall, and secondly that it's distinctly non-analogue. Yet this is seemingly what the Vintage Modern concept is all about: retaining the most important elements of Marshall's classic era tone, yet adding



■ A simple rear panel for the head: effects loop, speaker outs, impedance switch and footswitch



■ The 'detail' and 'body' pots are dual gain controls, controlling separate frequencies



■ The series effects loop has two levels, and you can also bypass it completely

features that the majority of modern guitar players want. We find it's best at moderate levels, adding an air of ambience and depth usually lacking from the fat, direct Marshall tone.

Finally, you also have the option of a series effects loop, which can be bypassed completely if you don't want to use it. This is often beneficial to the core tone of the amp as, no matter how good, effects loops always seem to rob something of the amp's unsullied tone. With a couple of wibbly-wobbly boxes in there doing their thing, the amp's pure, core tone is largely covered up anyway, so here you have the option to take either approach. The loop has two preset levels (-10 and +4dB), leaving fine level adjustments down to your effects units themselves, or a separate device elsewhere in the effects loop chain.

A quick delve on the inside reveals a high quality, custom PCB-based design as is the case with the vast majority of modern amplifiers, while back outside again, the purple mains light lets you know when it's fired up. Cooler than Christmas.

CABINETS & SPEAKERS

If your amps have to be black, or if you have an aversion to the small funny feller/symbol from

Minneapolis, you may be taken aback somewhat with the Levant choice here. For 'tis verily purple, particularly when the light catches it right. Don't panic, it's subtle and not at all offensive – and that's coming from someone who once banned the dreaded Goth-approved hue from this very magazine (don't ask). In fact, under normal stage lighting you'd have a job to distinguish it from black.

Underneath the vinyl, we can be thankful for solid and sturdy ply construction in the traditional Marshall fashion, both head and cabinet continuing the brand's excellent reputation for roadworthiness and quality. Recessed

TUBEY 12

WOOHOO – A 50-WATT ALL-VALVE 2x12 COMBO!

■ The Vintage Modern 50-watt 2x12 combo plugs an important hole in the range, one that gapes inexplicably in Marshall's current DSL2000 series.

Given the Vintage Modern's classic tone, and the fact that not everyone wants to lug a 4x12 cab, there are countless guitarists who are going to be over the moon with this. The combo has exactly the same range of tones, and as it has a closed-back cabinet, the mid-range and projection are similar, albeit lacking some of the ultimate bottom end and all-round girth of the head and 4x12. Great stuff.



■ Makes you feel kinda' warm, doesn't it? Marshall's 2007 half-stack, iconic as ever



■ A single channel, but with two 'dynamic range' modes. One has more drive than the other

side handles make carrying the 4x12 easier than it might be, while included castors mean you can whizz about on huge stages like a loony.

Speakers are Celestion 12-inch G12C drivers, a version of the legendary Greenback tweaked for the Jimi Hendrix Super 100JH amp. It's a relatively low-powered driver that's loved for its contribution to classic

rock tones. Strong and smooth in the mid-range, it also breaks up musically under volume and drive. Steve Dawson says it's the perfect partner for the Vintage Modern amps in his opinion, though is quick to add that those who like their rock a little harder and more modern may prefer the high power handling Celestion G12T-75 in a standard Marshall 1960 4x12 cab.

SOUNDS

The Vintage Modern amps are capable of a gloriously wide range of classic Marshall tones, but don't expect to extract them from the single stomp of a switch. To get the best of the cleanest sounds, you select low dynamic range and have the mid-boost switched out. With a Stratocaster, you need to dial in plenty of the 'body' gain control – around two to three o'clock sounds pretty good – balanced with enough 'detail' gain to add the requisite high end. Pump the master to about two or three o'clock and this is a lovely bouncy, bright chording tone, with enough edge when you dig in with the pick to add in some harmonics and musicality. Set like this, you know this is a valve amp for sure, but you might

HE DA MAN (WHO DESIGNED IT)

A QUICK CHAT WITH STEVE...

■ Marshall's Steve Dawson is the man responsible for the design of the Vintage Modern series amplifiers.

He is also the man behind the highly acclaimed, limited edition JTM45/100 and Super 100JH stacks, both of which use KT66 output valves. We asked him a few questions about the new addition to the family...

What was your main reason for choosing KT66s over EL34s in the Vintage Modern, Steve?

"The KT66 is really the epitome of vintage Marshall tone, and that's primarily what the Vintage Modern is all about. These valves were in the first 100-watt stacks, and are the sound of Hendrix on 'Are You Experienced?'. Clapton in Cream and pretty much anyone else who was playing rock in those early days. Marshall changed to EL34s in 1968 due to KT66s being in short supply, so the tone changed. These days the KT66 is available again, and with the JTM45/100 and Super 100JH being so well received all over the world, I thought a more up-to-date version of these amps would be a good addition to the catalogue."

How do KT66s change the feel and tone of VM, compared with, say, the DSL series amps?

"KT66s have an inherent low-mid bloom and smoother treble edge than EL34s. The overload characteristic feels full and warm when playing with the gain turned up, and the dynamic reaction to touch is lovely."

How did you select the boost levels for the high dynamic range setting and mid boost?

"I wanted the two dynamic ranges to relate to each other

in terms of volume and gain. So, when the gain is boosted, there's also a naturally corresponding volume boost. This is essential when making the amp respond to playing touch and the guitar's volume control, otherwise it doesn't behave or feel right.

The amount of mid boost increases the amplitude at 400Hz to the same level as the treble and bass, giving a reasonably flat response across the guitar's bandwidth. This was what sounded best in tests. There are so many variations of 'body', 'detail' and 'mid boost' to explore on this amp that in reality it takes several hours to fully investigate."

Did you consider putting some kind of variable control on these functions?

"The variable control in this case would be the guitar's own volume pot. If you are playing on the low dynamic range with the preamp gains turned up high and the guitar volume on full, and then switch to the high dynamic range, the same sound will be found with the guitar volume lowered to between three to five depending on which type of guitar you are using. This amp is designed to be driven from the guitarist's own playing dynamic and guitar volume settings as per the old-school icons – this technique is sadly in danger of becoming a lost art. When you master this way of playing, it creates a very natural and organic feel in performance. I really wanted to keep the amp's own controls as simple but versatile as possible, enabling the player to set their sound range then leave it, almost everything thereafter coming from the player."



## DETAILS

THE CLUE IS IN THE NAME - THIS IS EXACTLY WHAT WE WANT FROM MARSHALL



Marshall supplies a two-button footswitch for high/low dynamic range and reverb on/off



Vintage Modern amps also have an in-built digital reverb circuit... and a purple, vintage-style mains light



A mid boost and two dynamic range modes make for a versatile single-channel amp

## GBCONCLUSION

A NO-BRAINER CHOICE FOR CLASSIC ROCK

There are plenty of guitar players who've been waiting for this Marshall ever since the JCM800. Whether you want to look back from the 800 in terms of classic rock and blues, or forward to a modern hard rock interpretation of those tones, this amplifier hits the spot. That's to say it neatly leapfrogs what a lot of classic-era Marshall fans, frankly, really don't like about the JCM900s and TSLs.

These amplifiers are simple to use, and critically, they're responsive to your playing dynamics in a way that only a good tube amp can be. We can't stress how important it is to hear one in a band environment, because that's where you realise what Vintage Modern is all about. Splitting hairs, the reverb hasn't set us on fire, and having some kind of level or gain pot for the high dynamic range setting would be a boon for versatility. Those are minor, bordering on negligible issues, however. As a basic platform for a dynamic, responsive tone, we can't recommend this amp highly enough to all you Brit-tone loving classic rockers out there. Great sounds, great feel, great value. **GB**

## GBOPINION

### MARSHALL VINTAGE MODERN 2266 & 425 CABINET

#### GOLD STARS

- ★ A1 for classic rock
- ★ Simple to use
- ★ Highly responsive tone
- ★ Good value for money

#### BLACK MARKS

- Not everyone likes purple, but that's purely subjective

#### IDEAL FOR...

Anyone and everyone into classic rock and Brit blues, as long as you use your guitar's volume control

not necessarily know it's a Marshall.

Engaging the mid boost brings a significant kick to the level and drive of the middle frequencies (where the guitar's biggest defining voice lies), fattening out those single-coils. The glassy, airy quality becomes less obvious, supplanting punch for a more throaty, projecting tone, albeit still with oodles of the guitar's basic character. Here there's more of Marshall's customary hardness and direct nature in the mid frequencies, albeit rounded out compared with, say, a DSL50 which may very well be down to those KT66 output tubes.

Stand on the 'dynamic range' footswitch at this point and all hell breaks loose. It's a huge jump in volume and gain that we'd say will be over the top for a simple solo boost. You also need to adjust the gain controls to shape the tone better for heavy overdrive, the result of which is that setting up two sounds always involves something of a compromise between the two modes. The same is true of the mid boost feature, although this is not footswitchable, so it's more likely that you'll approach this as a set-and-forget function.

Despite that, all credit must go to Marshall for enabling so much from just the one channel. You can go from a clean-ish classic rock breakup to full-on distortion using the guitar's volume control alone. Strats bark into Blackmore territory with no problem, while Les Pauls benefit from articulation and note definition that can often turn into mud with more modern, less characterful amplifiers, especially when you're driving a 50-watt power stage to compression and overdrive. Speaking of which, that lovely, slightly squashy nature is there with these amps when they're cranked, if perhaps with more bloom at the bottom end compared with EL34s. If you want more headroom and less elasticity to the dynamics, go for the 100-watter.

## GB RATINGS

### MARSHALL VINTAGE MODERN 2266 & 425 CABINET

BUILD QUALITY	★★★★
FEATURES	★★★★
SOUNDS	★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★
<b>GB VERDICT</b>	★★★★