

With KT66-burning, gain-boostable power plus a digital reverb, the Vintage Modern aims to be all things to all rockers. Dave Petersen cranks it up

# Marshall

## Vintage Modern 2266 Head, 245A Cab & 2266C Combo

These days, Marshall has adopted a 'something old, something new' policy – hence the handwired 1959HW reissue that collected a 2006 'Gear Of The Year' award and more forward-looking models like the DSP-based MG100DFX. Now, with the Vintage Modern amp, we've got both sides in one. Styling-wise, it harks back to the '60s JTM45, but it has new valve preamp circuitry with footswitchable gain boost to give it teeth in the battle with the channel-switching competition, and a DSP reverb. There's a very intriguing vibe of hidden activity behind the Vintage Modern's business-as-usual facade.

Also of interest is the return to KT66 output valves, unobtainable since the mid-'60s but recently reissued, mainly for the Quad II hi-fi market. They're used in class AB, driven by a more or less conventional Marshall tone and phase inverter arrangement. The power circuit dispenses with the customary choke filter, but it's always a point of discussion just how important this component is to tonal excellence. In fact, as a test-ground for whether you can indeed improve on perfection, the Vintage Modern is perfect.

Perhaps the most significant departure is the preamp setup. There are tandem preamp gain controls, marked Body and Detail; an Amp Dynamic selector which reroutes the channel through another valve stage, providing about 30dB of boost; a midrange emphasis switch; and a



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Master Volume. The final result is enhanced with DSP reverb as required. Marshall has elaborated further than this with its DSL and TSL ranges, but the VM offers a stripped-down approach to getting a similarly wide range of tonal possibilities, with the guitar volume pot playing a significant part in the proceedings.

Structurally, the wide-open steel tray supports a drop-through Dagnall transformer set, with the big and beautiful KT66s right way up in the

amp head and bat-hanging in the combo. Valve circuitry is structured on two bigish PCBs, with a smaller PC-style board for the DSP reverb. There's plenty of space (for expansion?) on the panels and in the chassis, and it wouldn't be beyond conjecture for the DSP side to get more ambitious in future. Cabinetry is well up to Marshall's recent standards of excellence in styling, joinery and trim and uses the same 15mm birch ply as its top-of-the-range team-mates, ▶

### FACTFILE

#### VINTAGE/MODERN 2266 HEAD, 245A CAB & 2266C COMBO

RRP: Head £673, cab £490, combo £796

**Head/cab:** 50W single-channel valve amp with reverb. Two KT66 output valves, four ECC83/12AX7 preamp valves and footswitchable gain boost. DSP reverb circuitry. Cab: angle-front (also available in straight form) 1B with 4x12" Celestion G12Cs

**Combo:** Same specs, but cab fitted with 2x12" G12C. Front panel: single jack input; Body (bass/low mid) level control; Detail (treble/upper mid) level control; Amp Dynamics selector; Mid Boost selector; Bass, Mid, Treble & Presence tone controls; Master Volume; Reverb; pilot; standby switch; mains switch

**Rear panel:** IEC socket with integral mains fuse; HT fuse; output impedance selector; paired output jacks; Effects Loop enable/bypass selector; Effects Loop level selector; send/return jacks (series wired); footswitch jack

**Accessories:** Amp dynamics/reverb footswitch; castors for cab and combo

**Dimensions/weights:** Head: 75cm wide, 31cm high, 23cm deep, weight 18kg. Cab: 75cm wide, 75cm high, 36cm deep, weight 34kg. Combo: 69cm wide, 57cm high, 27cm deep, weight 30kg

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www.marshallamps.com

### First Impressions

Solid and firmly in the trad Marshall style, but the controls and that blue pilot lamp tells us there's a bit of evolution going on



Inevitably, the combo version lacks the half stack's bottom end – but it's still one hell of a good amp

THE COMPETITION

**ORANGE  
ROCKERVERB 50**  
Another excellent sounding valve head, with traditional tray reverb. Perhaps not quite as adaptable as the Marshall  
**RRP: £999.95**

**FENDER  
HOT ROD DEVILLE**  
Most of the same panel functions of the 2266C, and nearly as versatile – but will it saturate as warmly?  
**RRP: £669.99**

**ASHDOWN  
FALLEN ANGEL FA60H**  
Nice sound and aggressive price, with more range in the DSP – but there's a payoff in build quality and materials  
**RRP: £449**

and if the Celestions aren't actually G12M's but a revised and improved version called G12C, they might as well be. All the 2266 models will be available in colour options, but our head came in black and the cab and combo in deep purple. Another nice detail is in the soft-touch controls.

SOUNDS

We tested the head/cab first. After the uneventful power-up, with a very acceptable noise floor, all controls at 12 o'clock and the amp dynamics set to standard gain, the Strat delivers a warm but defined sound at practice level, reminiscent of the Bright channel on an early JTM45. A quick check through the tones confirms the classic Marshall contouring, with the Presence adding its brittle hiss at high settings.

Time, then, to advance the Master to max and push Body and Detail. Yess! With Body towards full, there's a wonderful fat, room-filling bottom end, and Detail adds a fine vintage top end that's clear yet emphatic. This is Marshall voicing at its best, perhaps its best yet. There's plenty of clean level available, but its softness of touch is superb, and the transit into distortion smooth. The possibility of choosing

The Body knob gives room-filling bottom, Detail adds fine vintage top end. It's Marshall voicing at its best

which register goes first is a bonus. The mid-boost creates bluesy saturation with single coils or endless sustained overtones with humbuckers. The interaction of the two Drive pots with the Mid selector produces a range of tonality that virtually guarantees you'll get the sound you're after.

The head/cab setup delivers nicely on bottom and low mid, but compared to a JMP50 into an original 'A' cab there's a lighter tonality and a less gutsy impact. This could be a speaker/cab effect or the payoff of the resistor filter used instead of the choke – but the Fender Deluxe-like saturation and huge range of tones more than make up for this difference.

The Amp Dynamics button teleports you into high gain overdrive. On the same settings as before it can seem a bit overblown; for best results, reduce the Body and Detail. The manual makes plain the idea of using the guitar's volume pot to qualify the amount of overdrive. At lower settings this indeed cleans matters up, without sounding indistinct or off the working point. Best clarity is found with single-coils, but when combined with the circuit's wide tonal range, this feature makes for versatility and controllability.

The effects loop is series wired, with a Defeat switch and a level changer allowing it to work at line or quasi-instrument level. This is an improvement, as many previous series-loop Marshalls used jack-normalling to carry the signal in the absence of an effects connection, which could cause signal drop-outs in older examples. The defeat switch prevents this, and the option of using battery or mains-powered effects is another box ticked. Finally, the DSP reverb. Initially it

didn't seem spectacular, but it's designed specifically to render the subtle, ambience-enhancing plate-echo commonly found in recording studios. This it does well, particularly in the high gain register of the amp, where the extra harmonics give it something to chew and a dead room can be given a more 'live' feel.

The 2266C combo shares the same virtues in a handier format. As you'd expect, it's less bottom-end efficient, and saturated playing tends to thin out the overdrive sound – but only by direct comparison. Clean playing makes a less noticeable difference. We tried the combo first and had no problem, so there's more than enough. If your idea of guitar heaven includes the biggest possible bass/low mid content, choose the head and cab. If handiness comes first, the combo.

VERDICT

It's tempting to try and relate the Vintage Modern to older Marshalls, but its tonal variety and smooth saturation take this amp to a new level, particularly in the areas that guitarists are willing to pay serious money to get into. For sound per pound, Marshall has raised the bar.

FINAL SCORE

Build Quality .....	16/20
Versatility .....	18/20
Sound .....	20/20
Value for money .....	16/20
Vibe .....	18/20

TOTAL ..... 88%

Good for... All retro and modern rock styles, alt. country, blues, blues-rock

Look elsewhere... Too 'Marshall' for country, and you might need an outboard reverb

