



ENGL (Powerball Amplifier)

BY KENNY RARDIN

When I first opened the box containing this amp I could not help but notice the heavy-duty industrial look of the unit, with its chrome-plated front panel and screen grille. It is easy to typecast amps as being one-dimensional simply by their looks, but nothing could be farther from the truth here. It is, in fact, one of the most versatile amps I have seen. This month, we'll walk through the new Engl Powerball amplifier.

Clean & Loud

When I first fired up the unit through a 4x12 cabinet with Celestion Vintage 30s, the Engl was set on the clean channel. I was very surprised to find a clean, warm, sparkling tone – very reminiscent of an old Voc AC30. This even sent me running for the electric 12 string, to see if it could do the Tom Petty or Jimmy Page thing, and with a couple of tweaks, the Powerball nailed it. Right then I knew I was not dealing with just another heavy rock/metal amp with little consideration for clean tones.

In addition to the clean channel – denoted

main/clean/crunch – there was another channel called lo/hi lead. Each of these channels had their own tone controls and button options. Clean features the usual array – gain, bright button, bottom button, bass, middle, treble-clean, treble-crunch, a clean volume and a crunch volume. The other channel for lo/hi lead channel is laid out as follows: channel 2 gain, lo lead bottom button, hi lead bottom button, bass, middle open, middle focused, treble, lo lead volume, and hi lead volume. Following that we have the open/focused button, Channel I/II selector, and Master A and B selector. There is also a Presence and a Depth/Punch knob. Presence – as

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on other amps — works in the power section and affects the upper harmonics and brightness, while Depth affects the low end, both in the amount and the focus or tightness of these frequencies. These controls work in the power section, thereby affecting all channels.

In a word, the lead channel is massive; with the available control of the low end as well as the open/focused controls, you can dial in the biggest, tightest low end around, especially for detuned modern rock/metal. No matter how far down I detuned my guitar, I was still able to retain definition and clarity of the notes. The mids could either be boosted or scooped radically, which was pleasing to me, as many amps appear scooped, even with the mids cranked. It would seem to me that the designer of this amp had great ears when choosing the frequencies that his tone controls operated in, as they were all useful and musical. This amp was also one of the loudest I have encountered lately and did not turn to mush at high volumes. No doubt this was due to the 100-watt power section, featuring 6L6GC power tubes and 4 12AX7/ECC83 preamps.

Safety & Features

Because the manufacturer fully expects the amp to be played at high volumes, ENGL has built-in a few features that contribute to the safety and reliability of the amp. First off, there is no impedance switch. This switch can be a trouble spot, because there is a lot of current present — I have seen bad connections cause problems here. There are 4/8/16 ohm jacks used, and even more impressive is the power tube protection feature with its LED indicators. If a power tube shorts, or if for any reason the power

section begins to draw too much current, the system shuts down the offending tube while letting you finish the show. Switching the standby switch off and on resets it, but if there is a problem it will again turn off the tube (or tubes) that are causing it.

As for features? This amp has got them. The effect loop has the ability to switch between a parallel or passive loop. I prefer the parallel for ambient effects such as reverb or delay, but sometimes when certain devices are used — such as EQ systems — I look for a passive. The loop is well designed and is not noisy. There is something that I have long felt should be used in the passive side of loops, and now is built-in: a noise gate. Especially with modern gain levels, sometimes the hiss, noise and feedback gets out of control. The circuit in this amp is excellent and totally geared to this kind of music. It is adjusted by a knob on the back panel, and works on the lead channel where it is needed, leaving the clean channel free from the artifacts of this effect.






Another useful feature is the dual masters. The ability to set different output volumes for solos has always been desirable, but the ability to manipulate these levels can also produce more tonal possibilities, such as using the crunch channel set at a bit more gain and having its level up, so you can have the guitar turned down for bluesy licks and not lose volume.

A few further notes about switching of functions: all functions can of course be accessed from the control panel but there are other ways of accessing them. ENGL offers a footswitch called a Z-4 — essentially a switch that plugs into the ¼" jacks on the rear panel (there are two) where you

can control the dual masters, as well as the channel switching. You cannot access the crunch/hi lead selection with these switches. The Z-5 footswitch, which was included with the unit, I got for review controls all functions very well and is easy to use. The manufacturer also tells us that a MIDI switcher model — Z-11 — can be used to control the amp by MIDI.

In conclusion I would say that this amp is even more than it is advertised to be. I could easily make an entire album with this one amp head — rock, metal, blues, jazz, fusion, funk, and even country — and produce excellent results. It is a great value and I would recommend it highly.

Rating . . .

Tone...	
Craftsmanship...	
Features...	
Value...	
Overall...	



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MSRP \$2299.00
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