Sessionette 75W Combo

From time to time we will be reviewing some items of equipment to see how they're standing up to life on the road. This month **Paul White** kicks off with the Sessionette 75.

As recently as five years ago, obtaining a good guitar sound which was loud enough for gigs and versatile enough for studio use meant two things – size and weight.

The trend now is towards small, high quality combos which satisfy both requirements without breaking your bank or your back.

Advances in loudspeaker and semi-conductor technology have contributed to this trend and, consequently, solid state amplifiers have improved vastly in sound quality and reliability in a relatively short space of time.

In particular, one such combo which is quietly pushing itself to the front of the crowd is the British Sessionette 75, and I bought one of these from Rod Argent's in Worcester about a year ago.

Construction

Manufactured in the heart of darkest Basingstoke, this inocuous little combo belies its appearance which more than anything resembles an upmarket practice amp, measuring only 17.2 × 14.8 × 9.8 inches.

Five minutes with a screwdriver and the innermost secrets of the Sessionette are revealed.

The first noticeable item is a Celestion 12 inch 100 watt speaker which always inspires confidence and tucked away to one side is the Accutronic three spring reverb line. The cabinet and control panel are sturdily constructed with the controls recessed out of harms way whilst the internal assembly is to a high standard of workmanship.

Further probing reveals a simple but well-thought-out circuit which makes full use of modern low noise BI FET op amps to reduce component count without compromising performance. These are thoughtfully mounted in sockets so that in the eventuality of a fault developing, service is quick and simple.

Another plus on the servicing side is that all the components are in common usage and therefore easily obtainable.

It is interesting at this point to compare the design philosophy of British and Oriental manufacturers.

British instrument amplifier manufacturers tend to go for simple efficient designs whilst, to example, a Japanese amplifier is likely to contain a large number of discrete components, usually with quite untraceable part numbers, which is worth bearing in mind when considering serviceability.

The Sessionette interestingly makes use of a modular power amplifier stage which is, I believe, manufactured by ILP and is encapsulated in a block of resin.

This means that a faulty power module cannot be repaired but must be scrapped and a new one fitted.

This is not, however, such bad news as the modules are relatively cheap and easy to fit and can be replaced by anyone who is capable of using a soldering iron.

The amplifier is powered from a toroidal transformer which produces considerably less stray electromagnetic radiation than conventional transformers. In practical terms, this means that your favourite strat will sound more like a guitar and less like Darth Vader's laser sword. The reason for this is that guitar pickups, particularly non-humbucking types such as those fitted to Strats, are very susceptible to picking up stray electromagnetic radiation from transformers, and converting it into a particularly nasty hum, the intensity of which will vary depending on the guitars position relative to the amplifier.

Controls

Having now put the amplifier back together its time to turn it on and look at the control. There is only one input, the logic being that no self respecting guitar player would think of sharing his amplifier any more than he would his toothbrush. There are two channels marked A and B which may be selected by means of a switch on the control panel or by means of the footswitch provided.

The channel B controls consist of Gain and three band EQ, which defines its use as the clean channel.

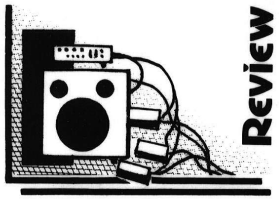
Channel A on the other hand has the familiar arrangement of two Gain controls, one to set the level of overdrive and the other to set the volume. The signal then passes through a variable filter and another switch on the control panel permits the 3 band EQ to be switched in or out of circuit on channel A only. This arrangement is very flexible and allows almost any desired guitar sound to be achieved. At one extreme the sound is thick and mellow whilst at the other – well, you can imagine a tortoise going through a band saw.

Lastly comes the reverb control which can be switched in and out by means of the footswitch. The reverb sound is as good as any I have heard and seems to be immune to the usual problems of clangs and twangs as you walk across the stage, thanks largely, I think, to the short springs used.

The back panel contains all the facilities that you would expect from a top flight amplifier including effects send and return, headphones, monitor out, and extension speaker, the monitor output being variable by means of a pot. One small disappointment is that connecting the external speaker disconnects the internal one, as the amplifier is not designed to run into loads of less than 8 ohms.

Sound quality however is excellent, being bright and punchy on the clean channel and aggressive on the dirty channel, and I'm sure that many people would think this a valve amp if they did a blindfold test. The volume is not only very loud but the sound quality remains consistent up to surprisingly high levels.

Nothing, however, is perfect and my criticisms are aimed mainly at the footswitch. It is too light, the switches are too close together, and there is no LED status lamp to indicate which channel is selected.



For live work, this amp will hold its own against an acoustic drum kit and for larger venues it would be miked up anyway.

Conclusion

I have been using this amplifier for over six months with no problems and have even used it for recording bass in the studio with a fair degree of success.

In conclusion then, what appeared at first sight to be an overpriced practice amp turned out to be a modestly priced combo of exceptional quality and versatility.

Whatever your style, whether you play in a cabaret band or weild an axe with "The Warriors of Goth", you could find what you're looking for in this amp.

The price includes the footswitch and soft cover. (Recommended retail price is £270.00).

Paul White

This Sessionette review appeared in the second Guitarist issue in July 1984, although the amp had been in production since April 1981. It's sales had largely grown by word of mouth between guitarists.

The review was re-run in the 10th anniversary issue of Guitarist. The one with Eric Clapton on the cover.

Sessionette speakers: The first 200 had special Fane speakers, then it was changed to the Celestion G12-80 which was discontinued around 1982. This in turn was replaced by the Celestion G12K 85, which was the mainstay for the vast majority of those made. We changed back to Fane in 1987. with a speaker designed to sound closer to the Electrovoice EVM12L, which had become popular with players like Larry Carlton. The EVM12L was the stock speaker for most of the Mesa Boogie amps at that time... so the change came from fashion really.

From personal taste, the G12 80 was the best and Celestion brought it back during the mid 1990s. I use one in my personal gigging Sessionette and it easily handles the 100 watts of Sessionette power poked into it!

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