



HYBRID HEAVEN

Kustom HV65 combo

By EMILE MENASCHE

ONCE IN A WHILE, a piece of gear pops up that surprises me. When I pulled the Kustom HV65 from its shipping box, my first thought was “utility amp.” This is, after all, a hybrid tube/solid-state combo with basic digital effects onboard. I figured it would be useful and convenient, as combos go, but when I plugged it in, I discovered something more. This utility amp actually has some soul.

FEATURES

THE HV65 DELIVERS 65 watts at eight ohms into a single Celestion GP1280 speaker, housed in a relatively wide combo cabinet that can sit flat or tilt back. The amp’s hybrid design consists of a preamp that combines a 12AX7 tube with solid-state circuitry, while its power section is strictly solid-state. The “HV” in the combo’s name stands for high voltage, a meaningful bit of nomenclature, since the Kustom taps into more juice than your typical hybrid amp in its effort to produce potent tones. Lead and Rhythm channels are on tap, and as mentioned above, there’s a 24-bit effect processor for sweetening.

The HV65’s top-mounted controls consist of the channel switch and individual gain, volume and three-band EQ controls for each channel. In addition, each channel has additional controls that complement its offerings. The Lead channel has a gain boost switch that adds more crunch on the front end and a switch that toggles between Grind and Punch modes, depending on whether your tastes lean to the smooth or the snarling. What’s most impressive about the Lead channel is how it lets you fine tune your gain curve to suit your style. The results can be warm and almost clean, or violently distorted, but the Lead Channel can also produce the all-important range in between those poles.

The Rhythm channel is just as versatile. Its Fat and Lean mode buttons govern how hard the 12AX7’s input stage is overdriven. Fat mode sounds like a nonmaster tube amp that’s working hard. For even more crunch, activate the overdrive button, which taps into the second stage of the 12AX7. Blues players could easily get through a whole set with these two buttons down and the gain setting at the midpoint.

As for responsiveness, the HV65 seems almost sentient. Not long into testing the amp, I found a spot on the gain control that let me go from rhythm to lead tones by adjusting my guitar’s volume control and my attack. After that, I never touched another knob on the amp again. My tone was entirely in my fingers.

EFFECTS

KUSTOM DESERVES SOME props for its common sense approach to the onboard effects. This 24-bit unit offers basic, good-sounding processing, including reverb, delay, modulation effects, auto wah, octave and combinations of some of the above with reverb. A tap tempo switch lets you set just one parameter per effect (for example, delay time, or chorus rate). However, you can store the edits made with the tap tempo switch for later recall.

Unlike some amps with built-in effects, the Kustom also has an effect loop, so you can add your own outboard unit and use it with, or instead of, the onboard effects. Other connections include a balanced XLR line out (with speaker simulation), jacks for an external speaker, a CD/Tape input, and two 1/4-inch footswitch inputs. Kustom makes a footswitch that lets you select channels, activate a variable volume boost and

KUSTOM HV65 COMBO

LIST PRICE: \$559.99

MANUFACTURER: Kustom Amplification, kustom.com

CONTROLS: Lead channel: Gain, Volume, Bass, Middle and Treble, Gain Boost switch, Grind/Punch Voicing switch; Rhythm channel: Gain, Volume, Bass, Middle and Treble, Fat/Lean Voicing switch, Overdrive switch; Boost Volume; Effect Level, 16-position rotary selector, Effects Active switch and Toggle Tap

OUTPUT: 65 watts

TUBE PREAMP: One 12AX7

SPEAKER: Celestion G12-P80 12-inch

CONNECTIONS: Instrument input, External Speaker out, speaker emulated XLR out, Effect Send and Return, CD/Tape input, Main and External Tape footswitch inputs

FOOTSWITCH: Not included

turn effects on or off, but it’s not included—the only negative in an otherwise great package.

PERFORMANCE

I’VE TESTED LOTS of hybrids where the tube did nothing more than add a little distortion and put on a light show to attract buyers. On the HV65, the tube and solid-state circuits work together to deliver the cut and shimmer we associate with valve-driven tones and the controlled smoothness for which well-designed solid-state are known. I noticed this when switching from my Strat to a humbucker-equipped Hamer Duo Tone, a great guitar that can sometimes sound flabby when going through an amp that has been dialed into the Strat’s comfort zone. The Kustom ably handled the Hamer’s low end, producing a syrupy tone that never sounded flatulent. What’s more, I didn’t have to make a single adjustment. This thing rocks.

THE BOTTOM LINE

THE KUSTOM HV is not just versatile but also responsive and full of great tone. With 65 watts of solid-state power, it can produce its entire sonic range at reasonable volume for stage and studio. Throw in the full complement of digital effects, patching options and the inclusion of an effect loop, and you have a workhorse with a soul that could just become the heart of your rig. 🌟

PRO	CON
GREAT SOUND, VERSATILE, SOLIDLY BUILT, BUILT-IN EFFECTS AND A LOOP FOR ADDING OUTBOARD PROCESSORS	FOOTSWITCH NOT INCLUDED, ONBOARD EFFECTS HAVE FEW EDITABLE PARAMETERS



Boost control acts as a master volume for both channels, not as an actual boost.

Toggle Tap button adjusts either effect rate for time-based delay effects or toggles between different voicings for reverbs and modulation effects.

