



Kustom HV30



FEATURES

30 watts RMS with 12AX7 preamp tube

12" Celestion speaker

Two channels, each with master volume and gain control

Preamp modes: two clean, two high-gain

Optional footswitch

PRICE
\$459

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ON THE CD



By Michael Ross

Given that amplifier tubes are now made almost exclusively in Russia and China, two countries not known for their stability, you might be thinking about weaning yourself off the vacuum valve habit. But what if you're not quite ready to totally forgo tubes? Then you might be interested in a new line of hybrid guitar amplifiers from Kustom. Called the High Voltage Series, these amps tout turbo-charged tones via dynamic 12AX7 tube preamp circuitry but eschew power tubes for solid-state circuitry. We reviewed the HV30 model (the series also offers 65- and 100-watt models) to see how this combo works.

LOOKS Though the HV amps share some features with Kustom's Coupe series (one of which, the '72 Coupe, we reviewed in our Holiday 2005 issue), their appearance is considerably more plain. Instead of the classic tuck-and-roll look, the HVs are dressed in basic black with a sporty white stripe around the grill cloth. Knobs are of the easy-grip, knurled variety. The ins and outs on the back seemed at first glance a little too utilitarian—i.e., they

aren't labeled—but there's a key nearby to help decipher what's what. Included are an XLR direct out with speaker emulation, a headphone out, an external speaker jack, a phone jack CD/tape/iPod input, and an optional footswitch in for channel switching.

LAYOUT Like the coveted out-of-production Music Man HD amps, the HV30 combines a tube known for its classic tonal qualities with a solid-state power section to provide consistency and reliability. Ace designer James Brown maximizes the tube's distinctive audio characteristic and dynamic range by operating the preamp circuit at high voltages (hence the HV). Each of the amp's two channels has gain and master volume controls. The EQ section shapes both channels with a single set of passive bass, middle, and treble controls. A 24-bit digital multi-effects system offers 16 effects, with Tap or Toggle functions for each effect.

The HV30's 24-bit digital multi-effects system offers 16 effects, with Tap or Toggle functions for each.

SOUND The basic tone of the HV30 may just be the warmest sound we've heard from a hybrid amp. The combo truly offers the best of both worlds:

the dynamic response of tubes with the tight low end and quick attack of solid-state. Played completely dry, both the clean and dirty sounds approached the complexity of an all-tube boutique amp. The clean channel's two modes aped American (Fat) and British (Lean) tones, whereas the Crunch and Grind options on the other channel delivered their namesake sounds. The amp's 30 watts provide plenty of power for small gigs and amazing low end through the single Celestion 12. Running it into a 4x12 Carvin cabinet showed that the HV30, though not a super high-gain machine, could easily rock a house of any size. It was a while before we were tempted to try the effects, but when we did, we were awed by the quality of their sound and the care in programming. Lush reverbs share space with warm delays, two octave choices (down and up), and a rotary speaker that ramps speed. Only the phasiness of the trem disappeared.

IS IT FOR YOU? We were totally taken with Kustom's Coupe series and can recommend the HV line just as highly. For spectacular tone, versatility, and price, the HV30 more than earns its One Award.

