

Fire When Ready

The BC Audio Amplifier No. 7

NORMALLY, IF AN AMPLIFIER builder uses any sort of Army surplus “material,” it’s joint Army-Navy (JAN) vacuum tubes. But when Bruce Clement at BC Audio set out to incorporate goodies from the surplus store, his eye was captured by something entirely different.

Based in San Francisco, Clement devised an original amp design and thought it’d be cool to house it in an Army ammunition case that makes handy use of its water-tight lid. And he was right!

Closed, the only outward hint this is *not* just an old ammo case is the stencilled BC Audio logo and thick pieces of rubber tread on its bottom. Removing the lid reveals the amp’s simple, straightforward yellow control panel and a clean layout. The panel consists of a detachable IEC power inlet, power indicator, power/standby switch, 1/4" speaker-out jack, Presence control, Bright Volume, Normal Volume and a 1/4" input jack. The valve layout includes a NOS 5Y3 rectifier, a pair of Electro-Harmonix 6V6GT power tubes (producing 15 watts) and a pair of Tung-Sol 6SL7GT preamp tubes. The Amplifier No. 7 is also set up to accept a GZ34 rectifier in place of the 5Y3 and a pair of 5881 power tubes in place of the 6V6s; this setup boosts output to 25 watts. Like many

of its built-for-the-military electronic brethren, there’s a degree of “over-built” with the No. 7, most notably its 16-gauge steel chassis, its point-to-point wiring (devoid of turret boards or eyelet strips), U.S.-made transformers, stainless steel hardware, and ceramic tube sockets.

Plugged into a 4x12 cab with Celestion Vintage 30 speakers, we tested the amp using a PRS Singlecut 245 with (very!) PAF-inspired humbuckers and a PRS 305 with PRS’ Strat-inspired 513 single-coil pickups.

Running humbuckers and with the Bright Volume turned to halfway, the No. 7 produced a clean, punchy sound with just a hint of overdrive and a fairly thick midrange. Taking the Volume up brought about some power-section sag, increased overdrive, and overtones thickened up to produce a very musical, crunchy overdrive. Dialing in some Normal Volume on top of the Bright not

only increased sustain and overdrive, but fattened up midrange response. Note-separation stayed consistent, even with both channels cranked. And though the volume it made is easily loud enough for most gigging situations, it was not at all hard on the ears.

The No. 7 has no Tone control, and you never miss it; the two distinct voicings produced by the Bright and Normal channels, combined with the Presence control, get you wher-

ever you need to go, tone-wise. Blending the Bright and Normal volumes, you can dial in as much brightness or thick midrange as needed to compensate when you switch from humbuckers to single-coils. And because the amp’s front-end cleans up nicely as you tweak the guitar’s Volume controls, you also won’t really miss channel-switching capabilities. The No. 7 does a great job of maintaining overtones even when the guitar’s Volume knobs aren’t running wide open.

Funky and maybe even somewhat esoteric, BC Audio’s Amplifier No. 7’s outward appearance may not be your cup of tea. But its heart, soul, and guts are 100 percent solid. This is a straightforward amp with a thick, crunchy tone, and it’s built with top-notch components, assembled right.

— Phil Feser VG



BC AUDIO AMPLIFIER NO. 7

Price: \$1,795

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