

ORANGE CRUSH PRO SERIES CR120H & CR60C £299 & £349
GUITAR AMPS



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Transistor bliss or solid-state illogical? Borehamwood's finest valve amp maker has something new for thrifty guitarists, and there's nary a vacuum tube in sight...

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What We Want To Know

1 Aren't solid-state amps just for beginners?

Well, yes, for the last few decades, the humble solid-state has been a stepping stone to a proper valve amp. But with manufacturers finding it increasingly difficult to source quality valves from the few factories that remain, we might just be entering the second age of solid-state.

2 But aren't they quieter than valve amps?

They can be, but volume limitations are a serious issue for most real-world players. Being able to turn your amp down without compromising the core tone is an advantage in the modern world of volume-limited gigs.

3 Can that core tone ever be any good without valves, though?

Well, that's what we aim to find out here, though fans of the Roland JC-120 Jazz Chorus would argue that it's been pretty good for some time now...

Since its 1990s revival, Orange has become one of the go-to brands for fans of Brit valve guitar tone, with its products now omnipresent on stages the world over from pub gigs to mainstream festivals. Meanwhile, the Tiny Terror's arrival in 2007 was almost single-handedly responsible for kick-starting the lunchbox amp craze that followed.

It hasn't all been about bathing in the glow of hot glass bottles, though. Recent years have seen the company make forays into the digital arena in partnership with IK Multimedia on the excellent AmpliTube Orange amp model plug-in collection, and there's also Orange's own OPC, a personal computer designed for musicians that brings the brand's unmistakable livery to your desktop. All the while, the Crush Series practice amps have allowed players who require nothing more than a

low-powered amp for home use to get their citrus-y kicks, too.

Utilising Chinese manufacturing has allowed Orange to keep the pricing of its recent TH Series valve amplifiers competitive, but until now there's been an obvious gap in the company's catalogue where more affordable amps with gig-friendly power ratings might sit. Enter the Crush Pro series; it has taken a while, but Orange admits that a lengthy R&D process was required in order to get them to sound right.

OMEC's technical director and resident valve amp guru Adrian Emsley explains: "The major breakthrough was getting as close as these have to achieving a non solid-state-sounding [transition between] clean, crunch and overdrive. We thought about going down the digital route like most other brands, but then thought it would be way cooler to make them fully analogue apart from the reverb. The main thing we

The Rivals

For those looking for a gig-ready amp at the affordable end of the market, **Blackstar's ID Series** is a must-try. The **ID:60TVP** 1x12 combo's (£399) sounds may be digital in origin but they are close to the 'real thing'. Like the **Blackstar, Hughes & Kettner's Edition Blue 60-DFX** (£319) has an array of digital effects onboard but its core sounds come from a more traditional twin-channel solid-state configuration. Finally, **Peavey's Bandit 112** (£249) has been a rehearsal room stalwart for decades and many a player's first gigging amp

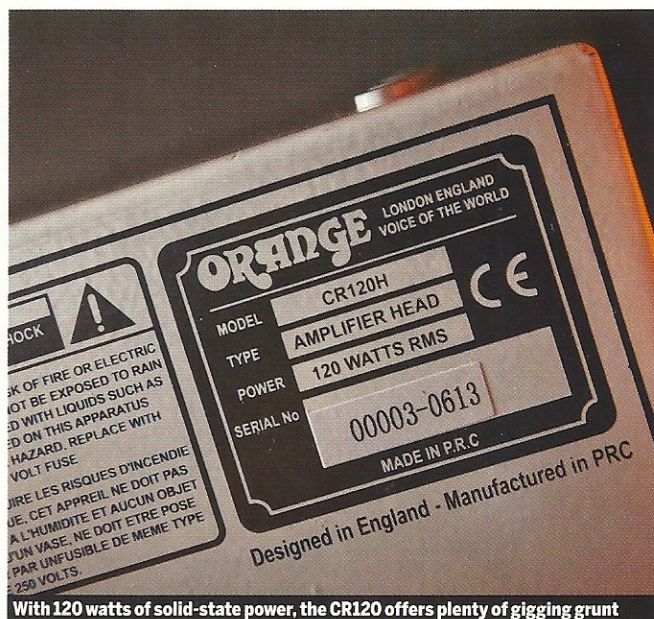
set out to do on the CR60 and CR120 was to give them the feature set and voicing of the all-tube Rockerverb series, but using solid-state components, namely op-amps. Both of these models make full power into eight ohms so that extra cabinets can be added if needed, without overloading the class AB, analogue, solid-state output stage. Both the effects loop and reverb are in the same place in the circuit as they are on the Rockerverb.

"Regarding adapting the Rockerverb circuit to op-amps, I was hands-on but didn't actually do the design work myself," Adrian goes on to reveal. "My part in it was more about tweaking the amp sonically and getting the output sensitivity nailed. Solid-state guitar amps will





The fit and finish is excellent, roadworthy and undeniably cool



With 120 watts of solid-state power, the CR120 offers plenty of gigging grunt

never sound or react the same as tube amps, but the goal here was to do something very cool with it, at an affordable price."

The Crush Pro series consists of the CR60 combo and CR120 head on test, plus a large 2x12 combo version of the 120-watter. It may be the baby of the range, but unboxing the CR60 reveals a reassuringly beefy combo that feels as robust as its more expensive valve-powered stablemates. For instance, its chunky toggle switches don't just look the part, they have a satisfying roadworthiness that you just don't get from the plastic rocker switches that we often encounter at this end of the market.

Around the back, the CR60's partially open-backed cabinet reveals Orange's own Voice Of The World 12-inch speaker; our previous experience of these drivers in the company's Compact PPC412 cabinet suggest that they are far greater than a budget 'own brand' option. The slimline but classic-looking CR120 head's pair of 16-ohm speaker outputs allow for three load configurations: one 16-ohm cabinet connected to one of the speaker outputs; two 16-ohm cabinets connected to both speaker outputs (or daisy-chained together to one of the speaker outputs); and one eight-ohm cab connected to one of the speaker outputs.

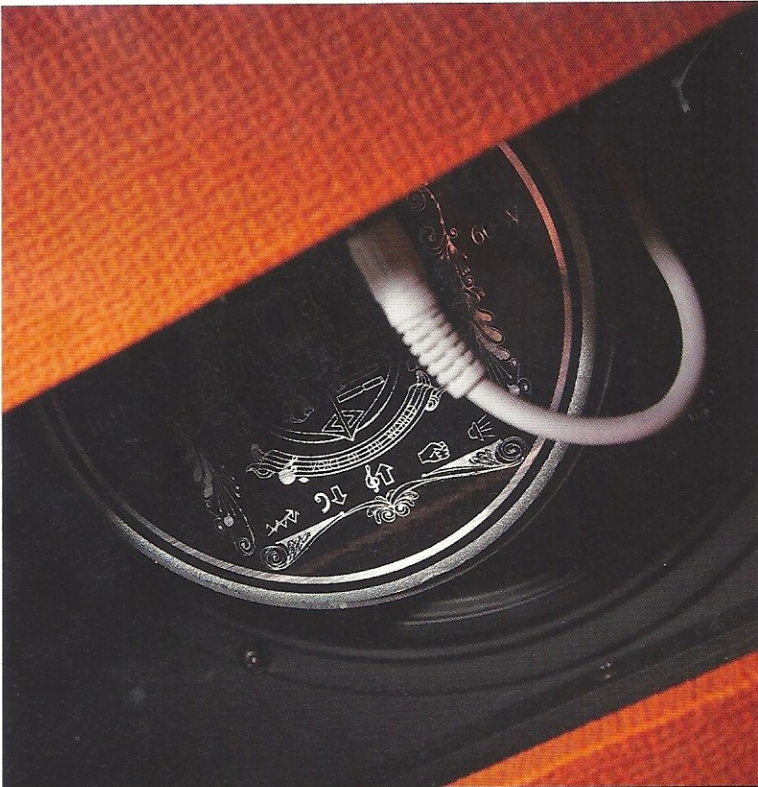
The amplifiers' identical control arrangement is logical and straightforward: where the Rockerverb circuits from which the Crush Pro amps are derived feature non-master volume clean channels with mid pots plus a dirty channel master volume, the Crush Pros simply have bass and treble EQ on the clean side, individual channel volumes and a global master

volume. For our money, the lack of a mid control on the clean channel of these solid-state Oranges isn't a big issue; we're much happier having the additional control and voicing options provided by the interaction of the clean volume and global master.

On both head and combo, the intensity of the digital reverb effect is controlled by a single

knob, and with spring, hall and plate-style modes, there's something for most tastes. Channel switching and reverb can both be triggered remotely via single latching footswitch sockets on the rear panel. Frustratingly, there are no floor switches included, but you can pick up Orange's robust and thoroughly roadworthy units for an additional £29 a piece.

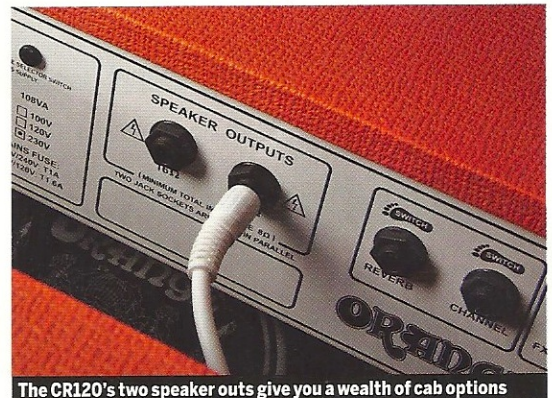




Orange's Voice Of The World speakers are no budget option – these are serious drivers



There's no mid control on the clean channel, but that's no problem



The CR120's two speaker outs give you a wealth of cab options

Also around the back is a pair of standard jack sockets for effects send and return – more proof that these are amps that mean business and have been tailored for gigging musicians.

Sounds

The first thing that strikes us on powering up both head and combo is what a good job Orange has done of making sure that its signature sonic DNA makes its presence felt. Much like the Rockerverb Series amps, the CR120 and 60's clean channels sound best when they're pushed into break-up, which comes easily in solid-state land thanks to the global master volume.

Despite the lack of vacuum tubes in these circuits, the foggy, soft treble characteristic that's something of a trademark for Orange is here in abundance. It works beautifully for chime-y indie-rock and retro Britpop rhythms. There's much more midrange grit than you'd get from a high-headroom Fender 'blackface'-style clean channel, so if that 6L6 clean sound is your thing we'd recommend that you look elsewhere.

The CR60 1x12 combo sounds big and powerful in the room, with more than enough punch for stage use in typical pub and club gigging scenarios. In a studio context, when monitoring the signal from the safety of the control room, it's more noticeable that the clean channel doesn't break up as musically and dynamically when you dig in as we've come to expect from Orange valve amps, but it's still a world away from the kind of characterless 'blunt instrument' clean channel that seemed commonplace on transistor 'rehearsal room' amps back in the 80s and 90s.

Taking over where the clean mode leaves off, the dirty channel – armed with four gain stages to the clean channel's two – can transport you from Free to Slipknot with just a twist of the gain and middle controls. Push the middle and treble, roll back a little bass, set the gain somewhere around noon and you have AC/DC-style classic rock crunch in spades. With the master volume wound up there's genuine chest-thumping authority from both head and

The clean channel is a world away from the characterless 'blunt instrument' of 80s transistor amps

combo, although perhaps predictably, even at the lower end of the gain spectrum there's less string separation and articulation than you tend to get from Orange's all-valve circuits. Conversely, however, if you want filth in the bedroom, both the Crush Pro head and combo are more useful than their more expensive valve equivalents.

At any volume level, a characteristic that these amplifiers share with the more expensive end of the Orange range is a palpable chemistry when used in combination with a PAF-style humbucker – there's just something special that happens when you plug a Les Paul or ES-335 into an Orange and flip to the bridge pickup. All three digital reverb sounds are well-voiced algorithms. Inevitably, the spring reverb mode is the most useful of the trio for everyday playing – it just loves low output

pickups and the shimmer of a Bigsby – but it quickly gets overcooked much past 10 o'clock on the dial, so proceed with caution. All three modes work much better in combination with the clean channel; it's easy to turn your dirty sounds to mush with the same level of 'verb. That said, more leftfield indie-rockers might enjoy the more cavernous extremes of the spring and hall modes – for live use it's easy to set the reverb up as more of a 'special effect' and stomp it in and out as and when required.

Verdict

Does anyone other than a proper rock star need a head and cab these days? Is the stack dead? These are questions that we've thrown around the *Guitarist* office of late, and with volume limiters in venues across the nation multiplying like brain-eating amoebae in a



With all the requisite Orange hallmarks, these amps still exude retro cool

With specifications pitched just about perfectly, the CR60C might be our new favourite 'first gigging amp'

disused swimming pool, it's getting harder to justify taking anything bigger than a small combo out to gigs. That said, it's usually a lot less painful to carry a head and a compact speaker cabinet up a pub staircase than it is a combo – though valveless, even the CR60C here is a substantial one-hand lift.

However, when you consider the requisite purchase of an additional speaker cabinet such as Orange's PPC212OB (£350) or PPC412 Compact (£559), the CR120H head becomes a considerably more expensive proposition than it initially seems. In comparison, the 349 pound notes that the CR60C will extract from your wallet make it the real bargain here. With specifications that are pitched just about perfectly for the cash conscious pub player, it might just be our new favourite in the hotly-contested 'first gigging amp' stakes.

A solid-state amp is never going to be a romantic choice, but at this end of the market it's all about practicality and performance. The new Crush Pro amps tick all the required boxes and benefit from looking stylish and grown-up into the bargain. While they'd never pass the Pepsi Challenge in terms of feel and tone when compared directly to a Rockerverb in a controlled studio environment, put these amps on stage, mic 'em up through a PA and they are more than close enough for rock 'n' roll. Be prepared to consign your negative preconceptions to the same scrapheap as the stiff and unmusical transistor amps of decades past; Orange has proven that there absolutely is a place for solid-state technology in today's amp market, especially when it punches this far above its weight, sonically.



Orange Crush Pro Series CR120H

PRICE: £299
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Solid-state amplifier head
OUTPUT: 120 watts
DIMENSIONS: 225 (h) x 550 (w) x 250mm (d)
WEIGHT (KG/LB): 14.4/31.75
CHANNELS: 2
CONTROLS: Master volume, reverb, reverb mode. Dirty channel: volume, treble, middle, bass. Clean channel: treble, bass, volume
CONNECTIONS: Standard jack, effects send and return, channel footswitch, reverb on/off, footswitch, 2x 16-ohm speaker outputs
FOOTSWITCH: Not included (£29)
RANGE OPTIONS: CR120C 2x12 combo (£479)
OMEC
0208 905 2828
www.orangeamps.com



Orange Crush Pro Series CR60C

PRICE: £349
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Solid-state combo amplifier
OUTPUT: 60 watts
DIMENSIONS: 450 (h) x 550 (w) x 290mm (d)
WEIGHT (KG/LB): 20.2/44.5
LOUDSPEAKERS: 1x 16-ohm Orange Voice Of The World speaker
CHANNELS: 2
CONTROLS: Master volume, reverb, reverb mode. Dirty channel: volume, treble, middle, bass. Clean channel: treble, bass, volume
CONNECTIONS: Standard jack, effects send and return, channel footswitch, reverb on/off footswitch, 2x 16-ohm speaker outputs
FOOTSWITCH: Not included



GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Build quality ★★★★★
Features ★★★★★
Sound ★★★★★
Value for money ★★★★★

Guitarist says: A budget head that doesn't look or sound like too much of a compromise

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Build quality ★★★★★
Features ★★★★★
Sound ★★★★★
Value for money ★★★★★

Guitarist says: A brilliant first gigging amp. We wish this had existed in back 1995...