





LAZY J

40 Combo

For most gigs a 40W valve amp will nail the perfect-power sweet spot, and Lazy J's latest creation has a knockout tone that's also tweakable for virtually any pickup. Review by **Richard Purvis**

They're getting a bit predictable, those *Guitar & Bass Gear of the Year* Awards. Our favourite amp of last year was Lazy J's 80 combo, and our favourite amp the year before that was its predecessor, the 20. So here's the Lazy J 40, sitting there like the third Chuckle Brother underneath a big sign that says 'This had better be good'. Well, yes, it chuffing well ought to be, but that's not to say it's a shoo-in for the Nobel Peace Prize and the Victoria Cross before we've even switched it on. Who cares about reputations when there are eardrums to be rattled?

No harm in a bit of background first, though. Hand-made in London by American-born Jesse Hoff, the original 20W Lazy J was based on the legendary 5E3 tweed Fender Deluxe but included a few alterations with a view to making the ultimate formula for vintage tone even better. It worked, and grown men crumbled with lust. The 80W version was four times more powerful, but the basic philosophy was unchanged.

This brings us to the 40, which started out as a custom order for 'half of an 80' but has now become a distinct model in itself. The most obvious reference point this time is the 40W version of the all-conquering Fender Twin; surprisingly, the modern reissue



Our amp comes with the optional tremolo and reverb modules... not cheap, but delicious

The solid pine cabinet's tweedy cloth is so richly lacquered it looks like it's dipped in caramel like a toffee apple

of this model - the '57 Twin - has now been discontinued, with only the more expensive Eric Clapton Twinolux version to replace it. Nice timing, Mr Hoff.

We're looking at two 6L6s in the power stage plus a GZ34 on rectification duty and, something you'll certainly never find in an old Fender, a UK-made Tayden Ace 50 speaker. This is a new, 50W-rated version of the Ace 25 (so

new that the one in our amp didn't even have the right sticker). Alnico Taydens are superb speakers, but they're supposed to sound like early Celestion Blues - as tweaks to the all-American template go, that's pretty tweaky.

The 40 has Normal and Bright channels which can be bridged with a patch lead in classic style, and as we've seen with the other Lazy Js, you

FACTFILE

40 Combo

DESCRIPTION

40W combo with Tayden Ace 50 speaker; 3 x ECC83 and 2 x 6L6 valves plus GZ34 rectifier. Made in the UK

PRICE **£1980** for basic model, **£2520** as reviewed (reverb module **£330**, tremolo module **£210**)

CONTROL PANEL **Normal 1 & 2** and **Bright 1 & 2** inputs; **Normal Volume**, **Bright Volume** (pull for gain boost), **Treble**, **Bass** (pull for bass cut), **Middle**, **Presence**; **Standby** and **Power** switches; **'Ground'** (negative feedback loop) control; **high/low voltage switch** on bottom panel

DIMENSIONS **60cm** wide, **45cm** high, **27cm** deep
WEIGHT **20.2kg/45lbs**

CONTACT **Lazy J Projects**
0843 289 4089
www.lazyjprojects.com

**Like this?
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Fender

EC Twinolux
It has twin channels, twin Weber-designed speakers and twin rectifier valves, but the new, Clapton-endorsed version of the tweed Twin is not cheap
RRP **£3083**

Louis Electric

Tremelux
Pushing 27W through a Celestion G12H, this American stunner promises more 6L6-driven tweedy richness and lush tremolo
RRP **£2200**

Victoria

50212
Another tweed type built around 6L6 output valves, this time with a pair Jensen P12Rs handling the 50W-rated output
RRP **£2500 approx**



Patching the channels and using the negative feedback control vastly increases the Lazy J 40's adaptability

can push the volume of one channel to modify the voice of the other. The top panel has two push/pull pots - Bright Volume pulls out for a gain boost, and Bass for a slight thinning-out of the bottom end - plus a 'Ground' control at the far end of the panel. A feature shared with the 80, and also seen on the Louis Electric KR12, this is a level control for the negative feedback loop. It's called Ground because the amp uses a generic chassis and the hole is where the earth switch would be on a '50s Fender; Jesse plans to change this as soon as he can think of a name for it! There's one trick around the back too: a rocker switch that changes the voltages within the preamp circuit for a tweed-to-blackface shift in character.

And there's more, if you can afford it. Our amp came fitted with the optional reverb and tremolo modules, easily bypassed with a double footswitch that includes controls for reverb level and tremo speed. The modules - both valve-powered, naturally - also have controls for reverb tone and tremolo intensity. It's a neat system, and in fact the whole thing looks better than neat, the solid pine cab covered faultlessly with a tweedy cloth so richly lacquered that it appears to have been dipped in

This amp is a successful combination of the sweetness and portability of the 20 with the room-shaking punch of the 80

caramel like a toffee apple. If you think the pots make a slight noise and the reverb tank isn't tightly fitted, you'd be right, but these aren't design flaws - it's deliberate. Jesse informs us that extra DC load on the pots is the reason they aren't silent, and that the reverb tank is mounted looser than normal to avoid feedback... so there you go.

IN USE

With a Tele into the Normal channel and everything at halfway except Volume at 3, we're obviously not dealing with a bedroom amp. The Lazy J belts out clean chords with impressive clarity and a mighty thump of bottom-end power that will topple drunks at the back of the venue. It sounds BIG. The Bright channel brings the high end to life but the low-end is not diminished and, as long as you're canny with the Presence control, it's not too shrill for lively single-coils. Full marks to the Tayden - it's sweet and well-rounded but adds a Vox-like bark to the classic tweed voice.

Things get crunchy pretty quickly - this is not a blackface-style clean machine, although customers can specify a circuit tweak for later break-up. The voltage switch can also make a hint of a difference, but don't expect it to smack you in the face; it's easier to add gain and compression than to take them away, and the best way to do that is just to turn the buggler up, or even patch the channels together and turn them both up. If you're familiar with the delicious creamy crunch of a tweed Bassman, Twin or Deluxe, it's all here. If you're familiar with amps that get ragged, flabby or fizzy when pushed hard, that isn't.

The gain-boost and bass-cut are both perfectly judged for maximum usefulness, and even better is the negative feedback control. Keeping this turned up full to be entirely rid of the loop allows the amp to bloom with unrestrained glory, while dialling some back in has a dramatic 'drying out' effect on the tone. I must admit I wasn't convinced by what I thought originally was a character-sapping function, until Jesse suggested trying it with P90s - sure enough, using the loop to tame the amp brought out the tight snappiness of these pickups in magical style. The reverb and tremolo, meanwhile, are every bit as luscious as you'd expect.

VERDICT

Jesse Hoff is no longer an underdog - with a client list that includes Beck, Bonamassa and Gilmour, you really can't be - so he doesn't need any favours from us. If the new 40 amp were a disappointment, we'd say so. It isn't; it's a successful combination of the sweetness and portability of the 20 with the room-shaking punch of the 80. You wouldn't exactly call it an amp of many voices, but what it does offer is an extraordinary degree of control over the finer details of its timeless tone. 🎧



Don't be fooled by the sticker - this is the brand-new 50W version of Tayden's alnico Ace speaker

FINAL SCORE	
LAZY J 40 COMBO	
Build Quality	19/20
Versatility	18/20
Sound	19/20
Value for money	17/20
Looks	19/20
TOTAL	92%