



LAZY J J20

Dan Steinhardt takes a close look at a modern bit of tweed. We can only hope that it's drool-proof...



Only a handful of amps have had as much of an impact on guitarists as the original Fender 'Tweed' Deluxe. A true classic, it was and still is revered the world over for being one of the simplest and most toneful amps around. Made in the 1950s, the Deluxe amplifier was the most popular of all the Tweed-era amps (named for their distinctive lacquered 'tweed' covering) and cemented its place in history with players such as Neil Young and Don Felder of the Eagles relying on them for their signature sounds.

From chick'n pickers to punk rockers, the Deluxe is loved for its simplicity, flexibility but most of all its wonderful harmonically-rich tone. Every aspect of the tweed Deluxe, from cabinet construction to components, has been analysed and measured by enthusiasts and technicians whose ultimate aim has been to reproduce its legendary sound. Jesse Hoff, owner and designer at Lazy J Projects has taken this obsession with the Deluxe one step further and designed an amp that is not only heavily inspired by the original but also includes elements that offer significant improvements. The result is the Lazy J J20.

Pre & Power Amp

There are two channels – normal and bright – with a separate volume knob for each and a single tone control presiding over both of them. The volume controls for each channel are mildly interactive, so

the volume control of the channel you're not plugged into will have an effect on the tone and 'tightness' of the channel you are using.

The preamp design is fairly basic and as such only a pair of 12AX7 valves are needed. These pass the signal along to a pair of 6L6 power valves which, along with a GZ34 rectifier, deliver 18 watts of conservatively-rated power. The Model 20 will, however, take lower-output 6V6s without the need for any adjustments for a slightly more manageable 15 watts with less clean headroom.

It's all pretty straightforward so far, but Jesse has also designed some really fantastic optional extras that can be fitted in a modular fashion in the back of the amp. For our review, we've been given the whole shebang – reverb, tremolo and the 'VAC' (Voltage Attenuation Control) circuit are all here.

An additional knob on the top control panel, the VAC reduces the volume of the amp by reducing the voltage in the power section, letting you set it anywhere between the full 18-watt output and a more neighbour-friendly 5 watts.

The reverb and tremolo modules (see box overleaf) are almost like standalone units, with their own driver valves and rotary controls placed on each individual chassis. They're easy enough to adjust, but could be a tad difficult to get to when playing live.

Cabinet & Speakers

The J20's cabinet is fairly compact in terms of 1x12 combos, but



The footswitch allows you to adjust tremolo speed and reverb level on the fly

FOR A MORE MANAGEABLE 15 WATTS OF POWER, THE J20 CAN TAKE 6V6 VALVES WITHOUT THE NEED FOR ANY ADJUSTMENT

there's still enough room in the back to accommodate the additional tremolo and reverb modules, never mind the spring reverb tank. Joining them around the back is a Celestion Alnico Blue speaker. Some of you will be aware that this speaker is more often associated with early Vox amps

than any other design, so it's presence in a Fender-inspired combo might seem strange. In fairness, the original Fender Tweed amps used an Alnico magnet Jensen P-12Q, meaning that the Celestion Blue, and the similarly-voiced Tayden Ace 25 driver, which is also an option, are

LAZY J
J20

Price: £1,749 as reviewed (base price £1,249)
Built in: UK
Type: Valve combo
Power: 18 watts
Valves: 2 x 6L6, 2 x 12AX7, 1 x GZ34; 1 x 12AX7 (tremolo module); 1 x 12AX7 & 1 x 12AT7 (reverb module)
Features: Bright & normal channels each with dual inputs & volume control, master tone control, bass boost switch, optional continuous power attenuation control, optional reverb module with tone & level controls, optional tremolo module with speed & intensity controls, extension speaker output, footswitch input
Footswitch: 2-button footswitch (reverb & tremolo on/off) with tremolo speed & reverb level controls included
Speaker: 1 x 12-inch Celestion Alnico Blue
Dimensions: 406(h) x 508(w) x 240(d) mm
Weight: 12kg (26lb)
Options: VAC attenuator (£100), reverb module (£250), tremolo module (£150), 1x12 extension cabinet (£495), 2x10 extension cab (£TBC)

CONTACT DETAILS

Lazy J Projects
 Tel: 0843 289 4089
 www.lazyjprojects.com

GB VERDICT

GOLD STARS

- ★ Authentic Tweed tones
- ★ Great range of options
- ★ Fantastic build quality
- ★ Looks the part

BLACK MARKS

- None

IDEAL FOR...

Tweed Deluxe-style tones with no strings attached

GE RATING



actually much closer in terms of tone that you might expect.

The cabinet itself is constructed using high-grade finger-jointed pine which has been covered in tweed and given a heavily-tainted coat of lacquer for a well-aged look. The controls are located on the amp's top surface and the grille cloth and cabinet dimensions are also in keeping with the Tweed theme. It's fantastically well put together and

has got that slightly home-made 'boutique' vibe to it, imbuing this amp with a very endearing quality.

Sounds

The original Fender Deluxe does one thing better than any other Fender in history – it rocks! Turn it up and you're Neil Young with Crazy Horse, but it is by no means a one-trick pony. The clean tones

are absolutely divine and have been used by country and jazz players for over half a century. It's the classic Fender tone but with a bit more hair on the note and a touch more harmonic activity in the mid range. So getting the sound close is not good enough – it needs to be bang on.

Plugging a Telecaster into the bright channel of the J20 with the volume half way up, we are



The J20 is completely hand-wired and every aspect of its construction shows the utmost care and attention



The volume controls for the bright and normal channels are mildly interactive

COMPLEX HARMONICS BLEND WITH TIGHT LOWS, THICK MID RANGE AND A TOP END THAT IS THIS AMP'S CROWNING GLORY

instantly treated to a tone that can only be described as 'super twang'. Complex harmonics with a big yet tight bottom end, rich and thick mid range and a top end that is this amp's crowning glory blend superbly – the choice of that Celestion Alnico Blue is simply inspired.

The J20 is spanky without being harsh, rich without sounding too hi-fi. Playing fairly loud, we find that there's plenty of headroom and digging in a bit harder with the pick reveals an impressive dynamic range. The normal channel doesn't have the top end sizzle of its counterpart but sounds great if you're after a thicker tone.

Turning the amp up to 8 out of 12 on the dial and things begin to get hairy. The natural drive tones are coming into play at this level and they really do sound great. On the underside of the amp's chassis is a bass boost switch, which was handy when using the Telecaster but unnecessary for the next guitar in line, a Les Paul Standard. This switch tightens up the bass frequencies so even at loud

volumes and with the output of a Les Paul there was no sign of a flabby bottom end. Cranked all the way to 12 we notice that things don't get much louder, but there is an increase in drive and sensitivity. It's now raging, with abundant sustain, and very loud.

We plugged a variety of pedals into the amp and it devoured them. Boosts, overdrives, modulation and delay effects were all taken in its stride. We also tried a prototype Lazy J overdrive pedal, the Cruiser, and it should come as no surprise that it blends perfectly into the amp, sounding more like another amp channel than a pedal.

Engaging the VAC control delivers a strange experience. The tone of the amp stays pretty constant until you get down to really low levels, when the lack of natural speaker break-up starts to have an effect. In an amp so rich in tone, it would be sacrilege to include a standard tone-sucking master volume circuit, but the VAC control – which is completely bypassed when all the way off – offers a real alternative



MODULAR MARVELS

The J20's ingenious tremolo and reverb add-ons

These clever reverb and tremolo modules have been designed by Jesse Hoff and allow the customer to accessorise the J20 with just the features he or she wants without changing its aesthetic – the modules sit in the back of the amp out of sight.

The reverb module (an extra £250) features the usual level control, as well as a tone control that allows you to go from very dark to warm and lush, changing the reverb's character completely. The tremolo (£150) is your usual Fender-style affair, with simple intensity (depth) and rate knobs. It might seem like a bit of an awkward placement of the controls, tucked away

at the back of the combo, but fear not as Jesse has thought of everything. The included footswitch features on/off stop buttons for both effects but also two rotary knobs which allow you to vary the reverb's level and the tremolo's speed on the fly, just as if they were an effects pedal in front of you. Inspired.

The original Tweed Deluxe featured no extra bells and whistles and without these extra features the J20 is still a very attractive proposition. However, the option to add reverb, tremolo or indeed the VAC attenuator (£100), all without changing the look or tone of the amp, is really excellent.

that, in this amp, works very well.

It's worth noting that Lazy J also produces a matching extension cab, should you need a bit more spread on stage. Trying out the 1x12 cab fitted with a Tayden Ace 25 speaker, we have the opportunity to compare its performance to the celebrated Celestion Blue. In short, both are an excellent fit for this amp but we perhaps just lean towards the Tayden, which sounds almost like a road-worn Blue that already has 100 loud gigs under its belt.

Conclusion

There is a misconception among many of the modern 'boutique' amp designers that you can build a better amp by simply using the same vintage circuit but with higher-quality components. Often

they end up with an amp that sounds great but falls short when compared to the original. Luckily, this isn't at all the case with the J20. Jesse Hoff has gone to incredible lengths to understand exactly what gave the Tweed Deluxe its character in the first place, and then used that as a starting point to design and manufacture what is easily one of the best amps being made in the UK today. Yes, the components are top-notch, as is the build and the finish, but this amp is not about simply ripping off a classic. Over two decades, Jesse has corrected perceived inadequacies in the design but at the same time ensured that none of his additions get in the way of the thing that matters most – tone. And on this amp, it's nothing short of remarkable. GB