

The SK120's 120-watt output is pumped through a 10" speaker

Feedback is the disease. This amp's notch filter is the cure



The SK120 has 16 onboard digital effects like flange, delay and rotary speaker

£649

HEADWAY SHIRE KING SK120

SICK OF YOUR ACOUSTIC GUITAR SQUEALING LIKE A LITTLE PIGGY DURING UNPLUGGED GIGS? THEN CHECK OUT THE HEADWAY... WORDS: HENRY YATES

> THE SIZZLE

Some guitarists don't see the point of acoustic amps. They will argue that plugging their Ovation bowlback into a standard Marshall produces a *noise*, and that's good enough for them. Up to a certain point we'd agree. If your Japanese acoustic only sees action once a year then we can think of far better things to waste your money on. If, on the other hand, you're starting to sell out bigger venues, spend most of your gigs on a stool and have just bought a Martin D-28, you might want to reconsider.

The purpose of an acoustic amp is the polar opposite of its electric counterpart. The reason you crank a Les Paul through a Marshall is to 'colour' the raw tone to the point where you're hearing the amp as much as the axe. By contrast, an acoustic combo relays the tone of the guitar as 'cleanly' as possible. As a rule, acoustic amps are up there with compression pedals in the tedious stakes... or so we thought.

WHAT'S IT GOT?

First thing TG noticed was that the SK120 comes with a 25-page manual (this bodes well, considering how most acoustic amps could list their features on the back of a stamp). The basic facts are these: you've got a 120-watt combo that delivers its power through a 10-inch loudspeaker and a moving diaphragm tweeter (this deals with higher frequencies). There are two channels (each with EQ) and a variety of inputs that deal with active, passive or piezo pickups, mics and even electric guitars. Just don't run a bass through the SK120 unless you want to pick bits of loudspeaker out of your face.

It's harder to amplify an acoustic than an electric. Setting aside the challenge of

getting the tone through the speakers in one piece, the archenemies of any mic'd-up troubadour are feedback, background rumble and unwanted clatter from the handling of your instrument. Recognising this, the SK120 offers a notch filter that eliminates these problems at the exact frequency where they occur.

There isn't time to expand on all the

"This amp is a serious piece of kit that will unlock the best possible tone from your guitar"

features round the back of the SK120 and, to be honest, they're pretty standard for an amp of this power and price (including an FX loop, line out and a jack for footswitches). Besides, we've got more interesting knobs to twiddle, like the 'FX Programs' one. The revelation that the SK120 includes 16 digital effects (from flange to reverb) changed our perception of this amp, bringing a welcome sense of rock 'n' roll to a spec that sometimes takes itself a bit too seriously.

BUILT TO LAST?

The purpose of the SK120's birch ply cabinet is twofold. Firstly, it has been fine-tuned to maximise the projection of tone. Secondly, it appears to have been designed to stop a charging rhino in its tracks. Weighing in at 13kg, with a vinyl carry handle and a truncated wedge shape that makes it pretty difficult to knock over, this amp should cope with the wildest unplugged performance.

HANDS ON

Fire up the SK120 and you'll find yourself spoilt for choice. The first decision is which input will best suit your axe (across the

WHO'S IT FOR?

More serious troubadours who want to coax the best tone from their trusty acoustic

INFORMATION

ORIGIN: Korea
OUTPUT: 120watts RMS
LOUDSPEAKER: 10" cast frame, with moving diaphragm tweeter
EFFECTS: 16 types [Hall 1, 2, Room 1, 2, 3, Plate 1, 2, 3, Chorus, Flanger, Delay 1, 2, Chorus + Reverb 1, 2, Vocal, Rotary Speaker]
ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Multiple inputs, Baxandall 5-band and 3-band EQ sections, active High Pass Filter, Class A and Texas IC chip pre-amplifier, Phantom Power, Variable Q notch filter, FX loop, FX footswitch inputs, Line Out, Balanced D.I. Out, Tuner Out, headphone jack
CABINET: Birch ply ported cabinet (in truncated wedge shape)
WEIGHT: 13kg
DIMENSIONS: 367mm x 417mm x 295mm
CONTACT: Hobgoblin Music 0845 1309500
WEB: www.headwayelectronics.com

ALTERNATIVELY

Carlsbro Sherwood Classic - £249
Marshall AS100D - £399
Fender Acoustasonic SFX II - £719

two channels, you have a choice of five). Then you want to work out where you're experiencing most feedback and set the filter to iron it out. You then need to set the EQ (a bigger task than you might think as it includes both a 'Hi' and 'Lo' mid control). The level of detail is incredible, but players dipping a toe in the scene might feel as though they could live without some of the embellishments on offer.

In terms of actual performance the most important criteria is how well the SK120 relays the clean tone of our guitar. In this respect TG was impressed. We were using the new Ibanez Steve Vai Euphoria (there's not much point pairing an expensive acoustic amp with a crap acoustic) and found we were able to push the SK120 to high volumes without colouring or undermining the natural tone. The effects are equally enjoyable. While it's true that bumping up the FX level compromises your guitar's identity, we reckon the 16 settings offered here will work a treat in live situations.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Only you can say whether you play enough acoustic to warrant an acoustic amp. But if you've decided you do, we'd recommend the Headway SK120 almost without reservation. Almost, we said. This amp is a serious piece of kit. It doesn't do things by halves and includes so much potential for tweaking that it seems a little bewildering, until you realise the dials are only there to unlock the best possible tone from your guitar.

FOR: Stunning detail, clean tone and cool FX
AGAINST: Pricy if you don't play much

TG RATING:

