



The three 15-watt beauties that make up the lower end of Marshall's MG range. When did amps this good get this cheap?

Marshall MG15CD, MG15CDR & MG15DFX £69, £89, £109



Amp giant Marshall celebrates its 40th birthday by dishing out the presents – in this case three amps for the tone-hungry but budget-conscious guitarist **by Nick Guppy**

Marshall's new MG series was launched earlier this year as part of the company's 40th anniversary celebrations, and is aimed at players on a budget who don't want to sacrifice tone. We've already looked at two of the larger models, the MG50 and MG100 combos, now we cast our eyes and ears over the 15W practice models that complete the MG range.

Like the rest of the MGs, these little amps are built in India, but quality controlled in the UK. The design is from the same team that gave us the AVT series, so we weren't surprised when the bigger MG amps delivered a lot more tone than anyone would expect at the price. Small amps like

these are just as relevant as mega-dollar, hand-wired exotica. We all have to start somewhere, and there are many players who don't want anything bigger. Even for those who have their backline stage gear already, there's always the need for something small, unobtrusive and portable to use either at home or for backstage warm-up.

All three MG15s share the same cabinet size and eight-inch speaker, and with all the controls and sockets on the front panel, they're simple and straightforward to use. The cabinets are MDF, and while not in the same league as a TSL, they're tough enough to stand up to more than their fair share of abuse. The styling is just as smart as the larger MGs, or any other Marshall for that matter. These might be the cheapest amps Marshall make, but they certainly don't look it.

Inside there's a simple open-ended tray chassis which holds all electronics except the mains transformer on one large PCB. All the components are auto-inserted, using a clever machine that holds a map of where each part sits on the board, and then pushes them into the right holes before the

board goes off to be soldered – another automatic operation, and one that's tricky to get right. However, on these samples all the soldering is perfect.

We were lucky to visit Marshall's factory a little while back, and the company have made some serious investment in automation, both for pressing steel parts like the chassis, and for component assembly. We often extol the virtues of hand-built and hand-wired amps in these pages, but let's not forget that it's Marshall's commitment to state-of-the-art manufacturing that makes their amps so affordable at both ends of the scale.

The MG15s all feature two channel operation – selected from a switch on the front panel. There's a volume control for the clean channel, a gain/master volume arrangement for the overdrive channel, and a shared EQ comprising bass, contour and treble. The contour control is a filter that cuts mid-range and boosts treble and bass at one end of the sweep and does the reverse at the other. It's the same circuit found on the larger MG amps and highly effective, letting you go from an all-out American scooped

MARSHALL MG15CD COMBO

PRICE: £69

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Solid-state, twin channel

OUTPUT: 15 watts RMS

DIMENSIONS: 380 (h)

x 375 (w) x 205 (d)

WEIGHT: (kg/lb) 7.2/15

CABINET: 15mm particle board

LOUDSPEAKER: Single

eight-inch Marshall MG

CHANNELS: Two

CONTROLS: Clean channel volume, gain, overdrive volume, bass, contour and treble. Lead channel select switch, FDD on/off

COVER: No

FOOTSWITCH: No

ADDITIONAL FEATURES: CD in/emulated line out, emulated headphones socket

Marshall Amplification

01908 375411

www.marshallamps.com

MARSHALL MG15CD TEST RESULTS

Build Quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

WE LIKED: Built down to a price maybe, but the quality's there where it counts – the sounds are superb

WE DISLIKED: The clean/crunch sounds could have done with a little more overlap



The digital effects on the MG15DFX amp are better than they have any right to be at this price



The MG15CD might be Marshall's cheapest amp, but you couldn't tell to look at it

MARSHALL MG15CDR COMBO
Same as MG15CD except...
PRICE: £89
ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Spring reverb with level control

MARSHALL MG15DFX COMBO
Same as MG15CD except...
PRICE: £109
ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Digital effects – a choice of reverb, delay, chorus and flange with preset/adjust and level controls
RANGE OPTIONS: Other MG Series combos include the MG50DFX (£249), the MG100DFX (£299) and the MG250DFX combo (£329). The MG100HDFX head costs £249 and the MG412A or B 4 x 12 cabs are £259 each

The rivals

Peavey Blazer 158TT	£75
Peavey Blazer 158TT reverb	£109
Fender Frontman 15	£64
Fender Frontman 15R	£84
Fender Bullet 15 DSP	£149

Only the major amp producers have what it takes to hold a candle to the MGs. Peavey's Blazer is smart and has a good range of tone, but sounds a little boxy even with reverb. Same goes for the Frontmen. Fender's Bullet is the only other amp in this league to have DSP, but there's an extra £40 to save up first

→ thrash tone to a punchy Brit-biased mid-range squawk with a mere twist.

All three amps also feature the new Frequency Dependent Damping circuit (FDD) which is also operated by a front panel switch. This circuit mimics the interaction between a loudspeaker and a valve output stage to give a more dynamic and valve-like effect. All amps also feature a headphones socket and a clever jack socket which functions as an input for tape or compact disc as well as a speaker emulated line out.

So that's all of what you get with the MG15CD. Now, while the MG15CDR adds a reverb spring with level control, the MG15DFX takes you into the wild world of onboard digital effects, with a choice of reverb, delay, chorus and flange. Two knobs offer a limited amount of adjustment, similar to the larger MG models. The preset/adjust knob governs your choice of effect and adjusts a parameter. Each effect covers a quarter of this knob's travel, and as you rotate it within each segment, delays get longer, modulations quicker and reverbs, well, more reverby. The other knob varies the effects level in relation to the unaffected guitar sound.

SOUNDS: Each amp delivers the same basic range of sounds, from crisp and

MARSHALL MG15DFX COMBO TEST RESULTS	
Build Quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

WE LIKED: Same as MG15CD but the digital effects are better than you'd believe possible at the price

WE DISLIKED: Same as MG15CD

All three are so sharply priced it's difficult to find fault. Forty years ago amps like these only existed in our wildest dreams

clean to full-out thrash, and the general quality of tone that emanates from these little boxes is excellent, with none of the boxiness you'd expect from a small loudspeaker. Above the halfway mark, the clean volume control starts to add a nice bluesy distortion, one that sounded particularly good with a Strat. The overdrive channel goes much further: from classic rock at lower gain settings to massive sustain, which is perfect for instrumental work.

There's more than enough range from the tone controls to suit any guitar. The most powerful control to play with is the contour, which can go from an exaggerated scoop with mids cut and treble and bass boosted, to an equally exaggerated woody mid-range thump. This needs a little taming – you only have to nudge it a millimetre or so to hear a difference, so use with care.

The MG15CDR's reverb is a little short on decay, but is clank free and there's more than enough level with no background noise as the level is wound up – surf punks will love it.

The MG15DFX is the one to go for if you don't like cluttering the floor with

stompboxes. Each effect is well chosen, with just enough range, and there's none of the grainy quality you'd normally expect in a budget amp. The digital reverb is a nice medium hall type, which will complement almost any sound, the delay is just long enough to do phrase-on-phrase harmony stuff, and both chorus and flange effects are both good examples.

The FDD (Frequency Dependent Damping) switch, common to all three, makes a huge difference. There's a bouncy dynamic feel to everything which disappears when switched out.

Line out and headphones sockets feature Marshall's loudspeaker emulation circuit, which is one of the best you'll hear – virtually no EQ is needed when you plug into a desk to record. And the line out also functions as an input for a tape or CD, so you can jam with your favourite bands.

Verdict

All three amps are so sharply priced it's difficult to find any fault. We can only wonder what the competition will make of them. Forty years ago, amps like these only existed in our wildest dreams. Today, Marshall are making it easier than ever for young players to get great sounds with minimum fuss. Today's beginners are tomorrow's guitar heroes, and as long as there are amps like this to inspire people, the electric guitar's future is assured. **G**

Marshall MG15CD, MG15CDR & MG15DFX

Guitarist RATING

★★★★★