

ALA MODE

Back in 2006, we attended a special preview event at Marshall's Milton Keynes HQ to witness the unveiling of two important new amps – the Vintage Modern and the JVM4. While both are all about classic Marshall tone, the approach could not be more different. While the Vintage Modern is a single-channel rock machine aimed at old-school players, the JVM4 is a multi-channel, multi-mode monster, offering four independent channels, each with three different operating modes, and a host of switching and programming options.

These are two great amps and they have rightfully received a good deal of praise, but they do offer a rather polarised view of the guitar playing public – you're either Mr Vintage Modern, who likes to just plug in and play, controlling his tone from his guitar's volume control, or you're Mr JVM, with his multiple presets, stack of MIDI-controlled rack effects and Dream Theatre t-shirt. Not all of us are so easily classified.

This year, Marshall has brought out the JVM2, a guitar amp that distils the JVM concept into a much simpler, two-channel package. Could this be the amp to cater for the needs of the many players who sit somewhere in between these two extremes?

PRE & POWER AMP

While the JVM2 presents the player with two channels instead of JVM4's four, each channel still has three modes, offering three increasing levels of gain. Marshall's designers have done an excellent job of making the amp as intuitive as possible to use. On the left-hand side of the control panel, the two channels, which are labelled 'clean/crunch' and 'overdrive', have each been given an identical row of controls, comprising gain, treble, middle, bass and volume.

MODERN VERSATILITY MEETS OLD-FASHIONED VALVE DESIGN: COULD THIS BE THE BEST OF WORLDS, ASKS DAVID GREEVES

Each channel also has a mode switch, and pressing either of these selects the relevant channel. Press the same button again and you can cycle through the three modes, causing the mode switch's indicator LED to change from green to orange to red, green representing the least gain and red the most. What's more, when you switch from one channel to the other, the JVM2 remembers which mode you were in last, so you don't have to cycle through to the mode you want every time you switch back and forth.

Next up, there are separate reverb level controls for each channel (the JVM2 uses a built-in digital reverb effect as opposed to a traditional spring reverb tank) and a reverb on/off switch. Again, the amp will remember whether the reverb was set to on or off on each channel when you switch between them. The same goes for the dual master volume controls and the effects loop on/off switch. The serial effects loop has a recessed mix control on the rear panel, along with a +4dBu/-10dBv level switch.

The presence and resonance controls, which adjust the high and low frequencies in the power amp, are the only controls that can't be set differently for the two channels. In all other respects, you can set up two completely different sounds, with their own gain, volume, EQ, reverb, master volume and effects loop settings. This is a tremendously flexible approach, especially when you plug in the four-button footswitch.

This excellent accessory is fully programmable, and you can either use it to recall four distinct control configurations, or set each of the four switches to replicate any of the front panel buttons. In the former mode (which Marshall calls 'preset store' mode), you simply set the amp

GBINFO

Marshall

MARSHALL JVM205C

PRICE: £939
BUILT IN: UK
TYPE: Valve combo
POWER: 50 watts
VALVES: 5 x ECC83, 2 x EL34

FEATURES: 2 independent channels each with 3 modes & gain, treble, middle, bass, volume & reverb controls, master presence & resonance controls, 2 switchable master volume controls, digital reverb, series/parallel effects loop with mix control, bypass switch & +4dBu/-10dBv level switch, power amp insert/serial loop with power amp in/return & preamp out/send sockets & bypass switch, MIDI control (up to 128 presets), MIDI in & thru sockets, footswitch input, emulated XLR DI output, 5 x speaker outputs (4, 8 & 16 ohms)

SPEAKERS: 1 x 12-inch Marshall/Celestion Vintage, 1 x 12-inch Marshall/Celestion Heritage

FOOTSWITCH: 4-button programmable footswitch included

DIMENSIONS: 510(h) x 690(w) x 265(d) mm
WEIGHT: 29.5kg (65lbs)

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THOSE MULTIPLE MODES IN FULL



■ CLEAN/CRUNCH CHANNEL

GREEN: This is the cleanest mode, providing a full, clear sound and plenty of clean headroom. The gain control sets the volume level and the channel volume control is taken out of the circuit

ORANGE: This mode copies the preamp topology of the classic Marshall JTM45/1959 'Plexi' amps – think classic '60s and '70s rock – but with a bit more gain than the originals

RED: The inspiration here is the JCM800 2203, the Marshall amp that has in many ways defined the sound of hard rock since the '80s

■ OVERDRIVE CHANNEL

GREEN: A 'hot-rodded' JCM800 sound that's similar to the clean/crunch channel's 'red' mode, allowing you to set up two distinct crunch sounds if you want to

ORANGE: This mode adds another gain stage to the overdrive channel's 'green' sound, with the extra distortion making it suitable for lead work and heavier rock and metal sounds

RED: Adds yet more gain for a seriously high-gain Marshall sound

how you want it then hold down any of the footswitches to store the current channel, master volume, reverb and effects loop settings, which can then be recalled at will. In a gig context, having four distinct sounds just a footswitch away is more than adequate for most players' needs. Switching is both slick and silent, and once you get the hang of this facility, going back to a regular one- or even two-channel amp feels positively limiting.

Meanwhile, in 'switch store' mode, holding down one of the footswitches and then pressing any one of the front-panel buttons will map that button's function to the footswitch. The default setting in 'switch store' mode, and the one that we found ourselves using the most, has footswitches one and two mirroring the mode switches of channels 1 and 2, with the remaining footswitches used to turn the reverb on and off and to toggle between master volumes.

If you're so inclined, the JVM2 combo can also be controlled via MIDI, and its possible to store up to 128 presets, comprising



channel, reverb, master volume and effects loop settings. It's perhaps worth pointing out that, whether using MIDI or the footswitch in 'preset store' mode, you can only recall the switch settings and not the position of the individual control knobs – these are regular pots that you adjust manually.

For all its clever switching capabilities, the JVM2 is a traditional Marshall valve amp at heart, with a 50-watt power amp (powered by a pair of EL34 valves) that's based on the power amp found in the JCM800 2203 and 1959 Superlead amps. Similarly, the increased gain of the orange and red channel modes is for the most part achieved by adding further valve gain stages to the signal path in the preamp. This is great news for those who are firm believers in traditional valve amp design but have long envied the programmability and presets of digital modelling amps.

CABINETS & SPEAKERS

The combo we're reviewing here – the JVM205C – is the 50-watt, 2x12 combo version of the JVM2. Marshall also produces a 100-watt head (the JVM210H, £889), a 100-watt 2x12 combo (the JVM210C, £1049), a 50-watt head (the JVM205H, £765) and a 50-watt 1x12 combo (the JVM215C, £859), so pretty much all the bases have been covered.

This cabinet is built from thick ply and is extremely solid, not to mention punishingly heavy at close to 30kg.

However, a solid cabinet is a necessity if you want a big, solid sound, and thankfully the JVM205C has a large carrying handle recessed into either side in traditional Marshall fashion. This combo is equipped with a pair of Marshall/Celestion speakers – one Vintage and one Heritage – which are equivalent to

Celestion's Vintage 30 and G12M 'Greenback' drivers. These are high-quality units that should provide an excellent mix of clear bass, punchy mid-range and crunchy treble.

As ever, beauty is in the eye of the beholder, but we must confess to being far from enamoured with the JVM205C's looks. A lot of this stems from the control panel. Granted, an extra-high panel is needed to mount all of those controls in a way that makes sense to the user (and it does), but we think that the expanse of brushed, gold-effect aluminium looks a bit naff, an impression that's compounded by the blocky 'JVM' logo that occupies a slightly odd and empty space out on the right-hand side.

Other features like the textured cabinet covering and plastic corner protectors are undoubtedly practical and hard-wearing, but the over-all feel is basic and functional rather than attractive or luxurious. And though the plastic buttons work perfectly, they do feel a little wobbly under the finger and don't do much to improve the overall visual impression.

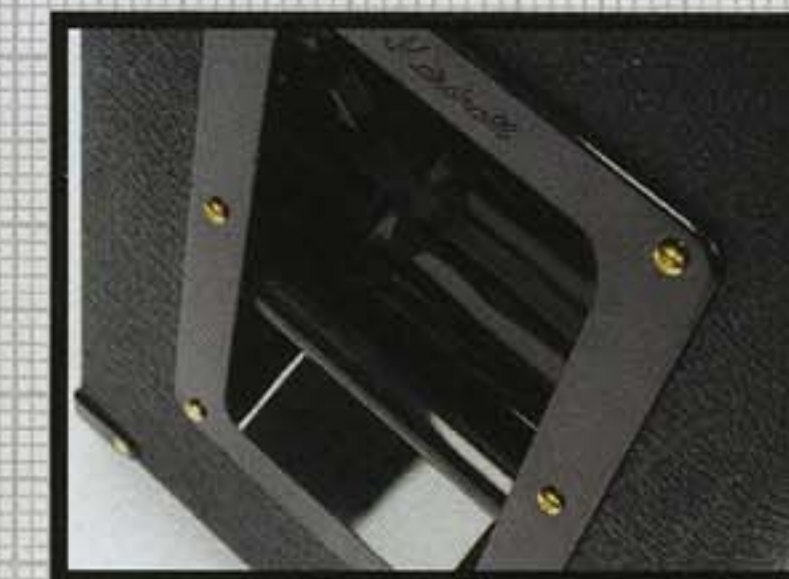
SOUNDS

As soon as we fired up the JVM2, all of these (admittedly subjective) criticisms were no so much forgotten as mown down, smashed to pieces and blown out of the window. The sound is instantly gratifying and compelling, and the JVM2 seems to have that rare knack of delivering a range of great tones with the minimum effort. You're unlikely to find yourself working the dials like a safe-cracker in search of a sound you can use – all of the controls work in a sensible and intuitive way, and it's actually difficult *not* to get a good sound out of this combo.

Having used the channel gain, volume and EQ controls to shape your sound, you can then set the overall level using the master volume controls. Like most valve amps, the Marshall JVM sounds best when

DETAILS

FLEXIBLE FEATURES AND FANTASTIC MARSHALL SOUNDS



GBOPINION

MARSHALL JVM205C

GOLD STARS

- ★ Flexible yet user-friendly
- ★ Capable of lots of different sounds
- ★ Excellent included footswitch

BLACK MARKS

- Not the prettiest amp we've ever seen

IDEAL FOR...

Anyone looking for a versatile gigging amp in the Marshall mould

you really open it up, but this combo can provide a good, solid sound at lower volume levels too.

The EL34-powered JVM2 delivers the trademark Marshall tone with gusto. It's a sound that's sometimes described as 'square' – not in the sense of being unmusical, dull or harsh, but just that the full and powerful mid-range means that you're hit by a thick, solid wall of sound. The good-quality speakers and the solid cabinet play a big part in delivering this, and there's no shortage of volume and bass, with lots of crisp bite and definition even at high volumes.

The clean/crunch channel's clean 'green' mode provides an excellent loud clean guitar tone that has tons of presence and oomph. The digital reverb is a real asset here too, and it sounds impressively lush and atmospheric, with more of a polished 'studio reverb' sound than you would get from a spring tank.

The 'orange' mode on this channel offers up a nice vintage-style overdrive. There's plenty of preamp gain on tap here, only slightly eclipsed by the 'red' mode, which is duplicated by the overdrive channel's 'green' mode. This

makes a lot of sense, as for many players, this provides more than enough drive and distortion and can be used alongside a clean sound on the clean/crunch channel. The overdrive channel's orange and green modes ramp things up considerably, and these impressive high-gain sounds are no less solid or convincing.

Using the footswitch, whether it's to flip between sounds, to either change up through the green, orange and red modes for more gain or to move between master volume settings, soon becomes second nature. We'd feel really confident going into a gig of any size with this amp to back us up – it's flexible enough to handle just about any situation you could think of, yet not so complex that we'd be worried about getting presets and settings muddled up at the crucial moment.

GBRATINGS

MARSHALL JVM205C

BUILD QUALITY	★★★★★
FEATURES	★★★★★
SOUNDS	★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★★
GBVERDICT	★★★★★

GBCONCLUSION

A MARVELLOUS MULTI-MODE MARSHALL

■ With the JVM2, Marshall has done an excellent job striking the right balance between flexible features and user-friendliness, and the result is a powerful and truly versatile amp that's practically idiot-proof.

If you are a serious gigging player who is after the full palette of Marshall sounds – from fat and crystal clean through crunchy overdrive to savage high-gain distortion – this amp has to be at the top of your must-try list. Thanks to tried and trusted circuit design, high-quality speakers and sturdy build quality, all of these sounds are reproduced brilliantly. Our only niggles, concerning the look of the amp, are greatly mitigated by the fact that the JVM2 offers multi-channel versatility approaching the likes of Mesa Boogie for less than a grand. A serious contender. **GB**