

Carr Bloke Amp Review

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A powerhouse throwback to raunchy classic rock tones with Carr's signature quality and responsiveness.



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Over the past few years, Carr Amplification has enjoyed a staggering amount of high-profile patronage and praise for their '50s- and '60s-inspired circuits. Perhaps it's all that acclaim for those mid-century-style designs that drove founder Steve Carr to develop the

Bloke, his tribute to that period in rock 'n' roll history where the pompadours and patchouli of decades past were ditched for sequined dragon suits.

Like any Carr, the Bloke is built with functionality as a primary concern: The 48-watt, EL34-driven 1x12 combo (which can also be ordered as a 2x12 or head) is ferocious sounding, but sensibly sized to meet the needs of modern players who are playing arenas less than they're working in smaller clubs and studios.

Bare Bones and Super Stylish

Like most Carr amps, the Bloke has a rather unconventional aesthetic to make it stand out under the spotlight. Clad in exotic faux gator-hide vinyl, the cabinet is dressed up in neo-classic, mid-century style—part hi-fi, part zoot suit, and part hot rod—that conceals a single 80-watt 12" Carr Elsinore speaker, custom crafted by Eminence.

In the event that you want to use an external cab, there's an output jack and 4, 8, 16 Ω impedance selector mounted next to the two EL34 power tubes. You may also order an optional effects loop, which situates the send and return between the four 12AX7s, so you'll want to take extra care when plugging in your leads to not ding up the tubes.

The main control panel is located on the top of the amp and easy to adjust if you leave the Bloke on the floor. A handful of black chicken-head knobs are arrayed on the white control plate, along a hot-rod script Bloke emblem. The low/hi toggle switch gives you access to the two different gain stages and is located between the two volume (or "loudness") controls.

The lead loudness only affects the lead channel, which can be engaged through the use of the footswitch or toggle, located by the input jack. Drive increases or decreases the preamp gain of the overall output, and will provide considerably more crunch in the hi-gain mode. The interactive treble and mid EQ carves up the tonal top end, while the bass control remains on an independent circuit giving you more control of the low end. Finally, Carr has added a polarity switch built into the on/off/on toggle—a welcome addition for those that have to play venues with suspect wiring.

Single-coils sound especially nasty, brandishing top-end teeth anchored in super-tight bass response—an excellent match for those royal Iron Maiden gallops.

White Knuckle Tones

The rowdy, whiskey gulpin' visual appeal of the Bloke sets up some pretty serious expectations. Fortunately, the Bloke walks it like it talks it. In low-gain mode, the amp starts to come alive when the gain hits 8 o'clock. If you're a clean freak, make a mental note: This position is about as close as you'll get to anything remotely crunch-free. Once you hit 9 o'clock, you're off to the races and the amp's bite becomes perceptible.

I was able to corner Metallica's opening-note gunfire of "One" with a set of 2k humbuckers on a DeArmond M-75. The low-gain mode seems very rooted in vintage Marshall voicing, and those attributes become more noticeable once you crank the gain knob into the upper regions. This is also where the bass control becomes important—

beefing up the bottom end when things get hairy. Since this combo has an open back and a single 12", you'll lose some of the boxy output you get from the closed-back cabinet, where those vintage heads usually nest. But giving that bass a boost with a high dose of gain will give you plenty of compression, and with 48 watts available, you'll likely leave the cabinets at home for most gigs.

The lead channel has a somewhat fixed character, as its only control is loudness. And some players may have limited use for it in low-gain territory, because kicking into lead will give you a serious dose of gain that's glaring against the smooth, clean low-gain sounds. If you like your leads to be leads, however, you'll love the stark juxtaposition and the ability to shock a crowd. A booster pedal may be more appropriate for players who like things a little less dramatic. Though the fact is that you're most likely going to be keeping this thing dirty and the lead channel delivers an extra scoop of gain and sustain that can make your solo soar.

The hi-gain channel explodes from where the low-gain mode steps off, cascading into heavy, hard rock distortion with the gain around noon, which is perfect for Angus Young tones with humbuckers. The basic character remains very much British, but you start to hear the brighter traces of a hot-modded JCM800 or an AOR series Laney.

Ratings

Pros:

Wide range of gain control, unique looks, and a tight EQ.

Cons:

Definitely expensive. Clean headroom is limited.

Tones:



Ease of Use:



Build:



Value:



Street:

\$2450

Carr Amplification

carramps.com

Single-coils sound especially nasty, brandishing top-end teeth anchored in super-tight bass response—an excellent match for those royal Iron Maiden gallops. My Telecaster needed a bit of treble reduction to round out the output, and I fought like the devil with feedback if I got too close to the Bloke, but the way it hangs at the verge of feedback without squealing is delicious.

The upper-gain regions will get really distorted while allowing each string ample room to sing, and the amp never really lapses into the blocky compression that plagues many modern metal machines. Kicking on the lead channel here turns 20th-fret bends into fireballs. You can also get some mileage out of using the lead as your main output and turning off the footswitch to engage a cranked hi-gain channel. Just be sure to dial the loudness controls for a proper boost blend.

The Verdict

At the end of the day, the Bloke is a powerhouse amplifier that delivers sweet, nasty, and defined tones. All that precision and sweetness does come at a price: \$2,450 on the street could get you a pretty nice vintage-voiced stack. But if big amps aren't your thing and very big sounds are, this little combo will be heaven-sent. It's chock full of lush overdrive, raunchy distortion, and a responsive EQ. The Bloke embodies the best bits of all Carr amps—especially creative approaches to better tailoring classic sounds. And now that Carr has ventured well beyond the realm of classic '60s tones, we're stoked to see what's next.

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